

# Drug Facts: **RITALIN**

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness



Ritalin, the trade name for methylphenidate, is a medication prescribed for children with an abnormally high level of activity or with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and is also occasionally prescribed for treating narcolepsy. It stimulates the central nervous system, with effects similar to but less potent than amphetamines and more potent than caffeine.

Ritalin has a notably calming effect on hyperactive children and a "focusing" effect on those with ADHD so that, when taken as prescribed, Ritalin can be a valuable medicine. Further, research funded by the National Institute of Mental Health has shown that people with ADHD do not get addicted to their stimulant medications at treatment dosages.

Because of its stimulant properties, however, in recent years, there have been reports of its abuse by people for whom it is not a medication. At their December 1996 meeting, members of NIDA's Community Epidemiology Work Group (CEWG) noted that:

- Some stimulant users mix Ritalin (or "West Coast") with heroin, or with both cocaine and heroin for a more potent effect.
- Middle and high school students crush and inhale the drug or take the pill orally.
- Some adults have been admitted to treatment programs for abusing the drug from their children's prescriptions.
- According to reports by youth treatment providers, some adolescents continue to abuse the drug, which is most easily available through diverted prescriptions. Drug abuse treatment staffs in Boston also report an increase in abuse among adults.

Because stimulant medicines such as Ritalin do have potential for abuse, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has placed stringent controls on their manufacture, distribution, and prescription.

*Information provided by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.  
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