Central nervous system (CNS) stimulants include prescription drugs, like those used to treat attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or to block sleepiness. They also include over-the-counter products that contain caffeine. Nonmedical use of these drugs has been linked to heart and blood vessel problems, as well as to drug abuse or dependence. When combined with alcohol, CNS stimulants can hide the effects of being drunk and increase the risk of alcohol poisoning or alcohol-related injuries. According to data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), the number of emergency department (ED) visits related to nonmedical use of CNS stimulants among adults aged 18 to 34 increased from 5,605 in 2005 to 22,949 in 2011. The number of ED visits involving CNS stimulants and alcohol also increased. Each year, about 30 percent of ED visits involving nonmedical CNS stimulant use also involved alcohol. To learn more about nonmedical use of prescription drugs, including ways to prevent misuse, please visit http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs.

1. CNS stimulants include but are not limited to ADHD medications (e.g., Adderall®, Ritalin®, Strattera®, Vyvanse®), other prescription medications (e.g., benzphetamine, modafinil), and caffeine pills and caffeine-containing energy drinks. Illicit stimulants (e.g., methamphetamine) are not included.


4. Caffeine-containing energy drinks had a minor effect on the increase in ED visits related to nonmedical use of CNS stimulants because most visits related to energy drinks involve adverse reactions, not nonmedical use. For example, in 2011, 70 percent of energy-drink related visits involved adverse reactions. Please see http://www.samhsa.gov/data/2k13/DAWN126/sr126-energy-drinks-use.pdf.

Source: The Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) is a public health surveillance system that monitors drug-related hospital emergency department (ED) visits and drug-related deaths to track the impact of drug use, misuse, and abuse in the United States.

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