From Rx to Heroin

Nearly half of young people who inject heroin start by abusing Rx drugs.

Teen abuse of prescription (Rx) pain medicine, also known as opioids, usually starts in two ways. Some teens start abusing it at a party or with friends because they're curious or think it will make them feel good. Others start taking it legitimately when prescribed by a doctor after an injury or dental procedure – but in some cases, legitimate use turns to dependence, abuse, addiction and then heroin use.

Follow Katie's journey below and learn more about how Rx drug abuse can lead teens to heroin use.



1

Katie suffers an injury that requires surgery. Throughout the healing process, she is prescribed painkillers.

Prescription drugs are now the most commonly-abused drugs among 12-13 year olds.

2

After a few months of taking the painkillers, Katie notices that they don't work as well or last as long. She begins taking more pills than prescribed.

1 in 4 teens reports having abused or misused an Rx drug at least once in their lifetime.

3

Katie quickly runs out of her Rx – and feels like she needs it. She begins stealing pills from a friend's medicine cabinet. She learns that crushing and snorting the pills can help her feel better, faster.

2/3 of teens who abuse Rx pain relievers say that they got them from family or friends.

4

Katie's parents notice that she is behaving strangely – and that she has a new set of friends. When they find a baggie of loose pills in her room, they become concerned and confront her. Katie denies that she has a problem.

95% of parents believe their child has never taken a prescription drug for a reason other than its intended use.

5

Katie asks her doctor for more painkillers, but he refuses. She can't find enough pills and begins to suffer from withdrawal. Her friend Jacob says he has heroin (also an opioid), but no painkillers. Katie never thought she would use heroin, but feels desperate to stop the horrible withdrawal symptoms. She starts snorting heroin.

4 out of 5 heroin users began first with recreational use of Rx pain relievers.

6

Katie's tolerance is very high and she cannot afford the amount she needs to keep away the powerful cravings. Jacob says she can use less heroin if she injects it. She is afraid of needles, but Jacob offers to inject the heroin for her. She agrees. After a few hours, Jacob notices that Katie is breathing very slowly and is turning blue. He calls 911 and leaves her.

Nearly 1/2 of young people who inject heroin start by abusing Rx drugs.

7

The paramedics find Katie and administer Naloxone, which reverses the effects of the heroin overdose. Katie is watched closely at the hospital. Soon after, her parents enroll her in an adolescent recovery program, which in this case, includes medication-assisted treatment, counseling and support.

Medication-assisted treatment is the use of medication, therapy and support to address withdrawal, cravings and relapse prevention.

8

Post-treatment, Katie's family is committed to continuing her care to keep her healthy.

Most people who get into and remain in treatment stop using drugs.

9

Katie is in recovery and working hard to stay sober.

With ongoing recovery support, it is possible to lead a healthy, productive life after addiction.

Is there a teenager in your life on a path similar to Katie's? Find help and resources at **drugfree.org.**

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Parents can also call our toll-free helpline: 1-855-DRUGFREE (1-855-378-4373)