

# The Rising Danger of Prescription Drugs

In a now-famous 2016 study conducted by Johns Hopkins University, patient safety experts revealed that more than 250,000 deaths occur each year in the U.S. due to medical errors. That makes medical mishaps the third-leading cause of death in America, following heart disease and cancer. But some say the actual number may be far higher, making the American medical system the leading cause of death and injury in the country. Many of these deaths are due to side effects from prescription drugs.

Gary Null, Ph.D., and his colleagues reviewed the medical literature and government health statistics, and concluded that the total number of deaths caused by conventional medicine is closer to 900,000, according to a PRN radio transcript. In addition, they claim that:

- 7.5 million unnecessary medical and surgical procedures are performed each year
- 8.9 million people are hospitalized unnecessarily

The mortality statistics include medical errors, infections, malnutrition, unnecessary procedures, and surgery-related mishaps, Ellen Kamhi, Ph.D., co-author of “The Natural Medicine Chest,” tells *Health Radar*.

“However adverse drug reactions, or ADRs, accounted for 106,000 deaths a year, at a cost of \$12 billion,” she said.

A recent study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that one in four

patients suffered side effects from prescription medications, and 13 percent suffered serious reactions such as internal bleeding or low blood pressure.

“Unfortunately, ADRs are not always recognized for what they are,” notes Kamhi. “The patient may instead be diagnosed with a ‘new’ disease when the problem actually stems from a prescription drug.”

The most recent statistics on prescription drugs from the Kaiser Family Foundation shed light on why so many people are being harmed by medications. Put simply, it’s their widespread use. For example:

- The average American age 19 to 64 takes more than 11 prescriptions per year
- Those over the age of 65 take 31 prescriptions per year
- Kids up to age 18 take nearly four prescriptions per year

“Considering you are at risk for ADRs if you take two or more medications — and an extremely increased risk if you take four or more — many Americans are putting their health at risk on a daily basis,” says Kamhi.

## Increasing Prescriptions

Prescription drug use in America is not just rising among seniors and middle-age people. According to a report by Medco Health Solutions, the increase in prescription drug use among children is four times greater than that of the general population.

Kamhi says that fueling the

rise are significant jumps in prescriptions to treat Type 2 diabetes, depression, anxiety, blood pressure, cholesterol, heartburn, and acid reflux — conditions normally associated with adults.

Reuters reported on a study of nearly 10,000 adults who took at least three opioid painkiller prescriptions daily to treat chronic pain, finding that 51 of them suffered an overdose and six died as a result.

The higher the dosage, the more likely an overdose occurred, according to Reuters.

Adverse reactions can also occur by mixing prescription drugs with other drugs you may be taking. Dr. Newman-Toker, M.D., Ph.D., tells *Health Radar*, “Make sure your doctor knows every drug, herb, or supplement you are taking. This helps keep records up to date and can prevent negative interaction between medications. Also reveal any allergies you have. Make sure that you can read the prescription and double-check with the pharmacist to ensure that the treatment is correct.”

Kamhi says that the root of the problem is that prescription drugs have been overprescribed for conditions that could be treated safely and sanely with lifestyle modifications.

“Ideally, the best way to reduce your risk of having an adverse reaction to a drug is to limit your exposure in the first place,” she says. “This is something that can — and should — be done as a matter of course throughout your life.” □