As the semester here at Grand Valley comes closer to an end, the dreaded final exams, projects and papers due dates are approaching fast. It’s a very stressful time for all students as many hours studying for one test can make or break their future. Depending on the class, a significant percentage of the final count towards the entire grade. Many students may feel unprepared, not know how or what to study and feel alone. The stress and increased anxiety turn into pulling all-nighters, doing last minute studying, and cramming in all the work in a short period of time. This sort of activity can push students over the edge to where they rely on Adderall, the “study drug” to stay focused and stay awake.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse conducted a survey where 11% of college students admitted to using Adderall or similar stimulants without a prescription.

Hey, welcome back to another episode of, “In the Mix,” through the Alcohol and Other Drug Services here at Grand Valley. As always, I’m your host Zachary Plisko back here for season 2 episode 4. We’ll discuss various topics of alcohol and other drugs within the college environment to educate listeners to be safe, be responsible and be smart when it comes to substances. Today’s episode will cover what study drugs are, prescription use versus non-prescription use, why college students use it, and other strategies to prepare students for finals.

First, we’ll go over what Adderall is.

Adderall is a drug that first was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1996. To get into a little bit of the science aspect, Adderall is a combination of amphetamine and dextroamphetamine, which are two nerve stimulates that improve focus and reduce impulsivity by increasing dopamine and norepinephrine levels to the brain. Adderall then binds to the norepinephrine and dopamine receptors in the brain and the epinephrine receptors in the adrenal gland. The result is an increase of “feel-good” chemicals to improve an individual’s concentration.

Another note. Adderall is a Schedule II controlled substance, meaning that it has a high potential for abuse. It’s in the same category as methamphetamine, opium, cocaine, and oxycodone. These drugs and Adderall may lead to severe psychological or physical dependence. Though meant for prescription use, it’s also used for illicit purposes.

After describing the drug, let’s go over the prescription use and non-prescription use.

*Center 4 Research* notes that 2.5 million Americans are prescribed medications for those with ADHD, which stands for, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. It’s a chronic condition that includes, attention difficulty, hyperactivity and impulsivity. Usually ADHD happens during childhood and persists into adulthood. This often contributes to low self-esteem, troubled relationships and difficulty at school or work.

When stimulants like Adderall are prescribed it can improve concentration for those diagnosed with ADHD since it’s a direct stimulant to the central nervous system. It can help improve a student’s ability to stay on task and shows with improving grades.

Dosage varies depending on severity of ADHD. Lesser symptoms of ADHD, prescriptions usually are 5mg tablets that are round, blue and marked with a “5”. Those with moderate symptoms, tablets are also round, blue, but marked with a “10”. People with severe cases may use 20 milligrams and see a yellow-orange, round tablet marked with a “20”. Capsules are also used, but color varies like, blue-clear, blue-white, orange, orange-white, and orange-clear.

It’s illegal to possess Adderall without a subscription. People who take it without prescription will have an excess amount of dopamine in which users may experience feelings of euphoria, increased energy levels and possibly dangerous physical and emotional side effects.

We’ll go over the overall effects Adderall can have on those not meant to take the drug.

Side effects include nervousness, restlessness, headaches, loss of appetite, and problems sleeping. If taking Adderall over a long period of time, it can lead to premature aging of organs. The chronic intoxication puts stress on the nervous system, kidneys, and cardiovascular system. The cost of a single tablet over the counter is priced at 10 dollars, but for street cost it’s a lot higher.

Reviewing the effects of Adderall helps us understand the drug, but why do college students use Adderall?

For new students, adapting to college isn’t easy. There’s a new standard of studying matched with the college culture of pre-exam all-nighters. The alarming issue is most students admit to receiving Adderall from a peer. Sure, it might help stay awake and focused, but it won’t help with complex learning like writing a paper better or studying for finals better. Adderall is a dangerous drug that some students don’t see. Instead, students look at it as self-medicating for their own undiagnosed “attention disorder” use. Also, students look to use the drug as an alternative to caffeine. Sure, caffeine is looked at as a drug to reduce fatigue and drowsiness. It doesn’t compare to a powerful, illegal drug with stronger downside use.

Finding final study strategies can help students improve their focus instead of relying on Adderall.

Let’s go over a handful of strategies to help students’ study instead of relying on Adderall or other drugs.

1. Form a study group. When prepping for finals, find other classmates to make a small group and study together. You can set a block of time when and where to study and have classmates to fall back on with any questions.

2. Avoid the urge to procrastinate. Though it’s a natural tendency to procrastinate, it causes more stress on students and leads to worse scores

3. Get plenty of sleep. Research shows that it’s better to sleep than stay up. The more quality of sleep you get, the better focus you’ll have.

4. Create a study-oriented space. Environment matters. Set up a small area with basic needs of a desk, chair, good lighting and let others around you know to not bug you while in this space.

5. Ditch distraction devices. Nowadays, it’s tough to go a few minutes without looking at your phone. Research suggests even the presence of a smartphone is enough to prevent people from studying effectively. Tuck the phone away for a segment of time. An example is to study for 30 minutes, then go on your phone for 5 minutes and alternate until you’re done studying.

6. Make Your Own Sample Test. Develop questions and answer questions that would realistically be on your final. Writing questions lets you think as the professor and the thought process may benefit for the exam.

7. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Though it seems stressful a lot of times and lonely, many other students are in the same boat of preparing for finals. We discussed forming study groups, but even things like small chats with other students or going to office hours to reinforce concepts or answers can help immensely. Yes, the stress is there to go out of your comfort zone of asking, but the interactions with peers can go a long way in seeking help.

If more help is needed, the Alcohol and Other Drug Services has peer educators to help student needs.

AOD Peer Education is where Peer Educators can help students individually with drugs or other substances related topics. Peer educators promote the AOD mission of safe and responsible choices for GVSU Students. They receive constant professional development needs that can benefit students with relevant information or help suited to them. Peer educators are trained to build intervention strategies, listening skills, and self-care.

If you find yourself using Adderall in a non-prescription use state and wanting to seek help, make an appointment with a peer educator at the Counseling office, room C206 or call at (616) 331-3266 or email aod@gvsu.edu

And that wraps it up for episode 4 of, “In the Mix.” Remember there are other strategies for finals rather than relying on Adderall or other drugs to stay focused and awake. Until next time, I’m Zachary Plisko, see you on the next episode.