College is intended to create a new chapter in a person’s life where they learn more about themselves, create lifelong friendships and see what the college experience has to offer. However, for some students adapting to the new lifestyle of less structure and more independence can steer students in different directions. Alcohol flows through college easily and sometimes drugs circulate through parties, dorms and other means. Either way, students risk mixing the two together through social situations to loosen feelings of tensions, social anxiety and relaxation. Or, students use it as a getaway from the college pressures of having to do a lot of homework, use time management of school and work, or be dedicated to clubs. It piles on for students and whether it’s for social or college pressure use, mixing alcohol and drugs proves to be dangerous. Especially with Xanax, Adderall or Vicodin. These pharmaceutical drugs that fly under the radar for illicit use due to easy access from doctors or other students.

The *National Institute of Drug Abuse* notes that in 2018, 2.7% of college students misuse prescription drugs.

Hey, I’m Zachary Plisko. Welcome back to another episode of, “In the Mix.” As always, it’s my mission to inform students to be safe, be responsible and be smart when using substances. Here on episode five, we’ll be talking about mixing alcohol and drugs, specifically Xanax, Adderall and Vicodin. Also, I’ll be giving brief descriptions of these different drugs and the effects of mixing them with alcohol, why students do it and resources to help.

First, we’ll go over the common drugs that are mixed with alcoholic drinks.

Xanax is a benzodiazepine that’s common in treating anxiety and panic attacks. It works by enhancing the activity of certain neurotransmitters to the brain. The goal is to sedate a person by raising the inhibitory neurotransmitter GABA to the brain.

Side note. GABA is a lengthy word, but mainly it’s a major neurotransmitter which produces insulin for the central nervous system. It slows down or weakens signals to the brain. So, the drug decreases the abnormal amount of excitement overload the brain is experiencing.

Xanax is a schedule four drug, meaning it has a low potential for abuse, but still can lead to physical or psychological dependence. It’s commonly found as a tablet or concentrated liquid.

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. It’s used to treat ADHD, a chronic condition that causes attention difficulty and hyperactivity.

Adderall is listed as a Schedule II controlled substance, so it has a high potential for abuse. This drug is commonly taken as a tablet.

Be sure to check out episode four of, “In the Mix,” where I spend a whole episode breaking down the uses of Adderall and how it’s affecting students.

Lastly, Vicodin is one of several branded formulations of hydrocodone. A pain reliever. It’s the drug usually given after having wisdom teeth removed or other surgeries. It works by combining pain receptors in the brain. Once binded, pain signals are weakened or blocked for about six hours.

Vicodin is also known as a schedule II drug where it can be addictive as people who take it build a tolerance and are needing more to feel the effects.

Alcohol is a highly reactive substance so when mixed with other medications that are prescribed or non-prescribed it can cause unwarranted consequences.

Depressants like Xanax and Valium combined with alcohol can cause rapid dizziness, stumbling and loss of control.

Stimulants like Adderall conceal alcoholic effects, so people don’t really know their true level of intoxication, which can result in over consumption. The result is significant impairment, coordination, judgement and possibly black out. There’s a common myth that combining Stimulants with Depressants is okay, because they “cancel each other out,” when in reality the body is affected when taking both simultaneously.

Prescription opiates like Vicodin mixed with alcohol can cause slowed breathing, lower pulse and blood pressure. Since Vicodin is considered an opioid, (*Drug Abuse.org*) alcohol amplifies the effect of the medication, often to a dangerous level.

As mentioned, there are many reasons why students may mix alcohol and drugs. Whether it’s building a new social life coming to a college campus and striving to try something new with others to obtain new feelings of enjoyment or the stress of college where there’s an overload of homework, classes, clubs and jobs, that it’s a lot to bear and mixing is seen as a relief or outlet.

The enticement of feeling something different instead of the regular alcoholic effects is also a thought when mixing, though proved to be dangerous as there’s so many drugs and different types of alcohol that when mixed. The reaction is always different and often dangerous.

Again, college can be stressful with a lot going on, but taking a few minutes out of the day to relax can go a long way instead of finding a new feeling through mixing.

Let’s go over some ways to utilize a few minutes of relaxation.

1. Yoga. Regular practice and routine of yoga can help people lower levels of anxiety. A tool that can be used anytime stress is noticed where it helps relieve tension and work on settled breathing.

2. Breathing Exercises. A quick-notice-tool where one see’s stress level increasing, takes some deep breaths. Inhale and exhale slowly. This helps slow the heart down a bit in attempts to get to a relaxed state of mind.

3. Acceptance. You can’t control everything. College has proven it can be chaotic at times. It’s a matter of budgeting the time you can to certain projects or activities that are of higher priority. Overall, do what you can in the time you’re given.

4. Overall, be sure to take the time out of the day to relax. Everyone needs a breather at some point of the day. Listen to music or meditate. Find a few minutes in your day to take a step back from all the things to take care of which helps clear your head.

As for social settings or situations where you may find yourself offered to try mixing, consult episode one of ,”In the Mix,” where I go over strategies on combating possible peer pressure with examples.

If you’re seeking professional help, the Alcohol and Other Drug Services here at Grand Valley provides resources if students find themselves struggling with substances.

One resource is the Screen RX. It’s an online assessment that asks several questions about your relationship with prescription drugs. The purpose is to inform and give students information to live their healthiest lifestyle. Once the assessment is done, you’ll be provided with individualized feedback, information and resources.

To learn more about or take the assessment head to gvsu.edu/aod/screen-rx.

If you need to talk to someone in person, the Alcohol and Other Drug Services has AOD Peer Educators available. They promote the mission to help students be safe and make responsible choices. Peer Educators are continually building new ideas and providing new professional development that can benefit students with relevant information suited for them. The first appointment is over the phone, but after that students can meet in-person for their appointments.

If mixing alcohol and drugs and wanting to make an appointment, head to the counseling center located at the Student Service building, on the second floor, room C206 or call (616) 331-3266

That concludes episode five of, “In the Mix.” Remember there’s other ways to enjoy socialization or relieve stress from a busy school schedule, rather than dangerously feeling the effects of mixing alcohol and drugs. Again, I’m Zachary Plisko, see you on the next episode.