

## “In The Mix” With AOD Episode Ten- Study Drugs and Stress

Hey everyone, what’s up! I’m Bethann Long and this is the tenth episode of “In The Mix” With AOD, a podcast provided by the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services right here at Grand Valley. Can you guys believe that midterms are fast approaching? I feel like the semester just began and here we are about to hit a halfway mark of the semester which is unbelievable. I know that this time can be extremely stressful trying to accomplish attending classes, studying for exams, getting projects done, and still finding time to take care of yourself. Trust me, I myself am having a hard time trying to get a fresh breath of air between all of the work that seems to pile up this time of year. With the added stress, turning to study drugs may seem like an easy option to help make the workload a little more bearable. We think that if these can help us just focus a little longer or stay up a few extra hours to get a bit more work done that it must be okay. However, these study drugs can have some harmful risks if they are being abused or misused by those without a prescription, and even those who are prescribed them. In this episode, we’re going to discuss what exactly these study drugs are, why students are influenced to take these drugs, the risks that are involved, and how society could possibly be influencing these drugs on younger generations. Then we’ll dive into how you can use alternative strategies to study effectively without substances.

Now let’s first start with understanding exactly what study drugs are. Sometimes also referred to as “smart drugs”, these are prescription stimulants intended to treat ADHD, or Attention/Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder. These stimulants are used to increase alertness and energy for a short time, and many students find that these drugs help them stay awake longer and be more alert when doing school work. These medications include Adderall and Ritalin, the most common prescriptions for those with ADHD, which have the strongest and most significant effects on memory and attention. Some people who don’t have ADHD choose to use these prescriptions because they ultimately believe that they will help them do better in school. However, they don’t increase learning or thinking ability to improve grades. So here is exactly what these study drugs are:

- Adderall is a combination of amphetamine and dextroamphetamine, two central nervous stimulants that improve focus and reduce impulsivity by increasing dopamine levels in the brain. This is a drug that is not available without a prescription provided by a doctor.
- Ritalin is another drug that is used to treat ADHD in kids and adults. This helps stimulate the mind and body in adults while also calming down children. This can also help people pay attention to tasks better and decrease impulsive and hyperactive behavior. Ritalin can also be used to help treat narcolepsy.

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With stimulants having these types of effects, it makes sense as to why college students would be influenced to try them out even without a prescription or diagnosis of ADHD. According to the College Prescription Drug Study that was done at Ohio State University, “85% of students who took prescription stimulants did so to study or improve their grades.”. This study also found that another 36% of students tried taking study drugs just to see what they were like. It’s also been found that some students are using these prescription stimulants because they claim that these stimulants are reducing their social anxiety. Many may wonder why students feel the need to be using drugs such as these to focus on their academics, but the easiest answer for this is to look at the way that our society functions. We live in a world that constantly runs at a hundred miles an hour, and is driven by people in a hyper-competitive arms race who will do anything to get ahead. In the Netflix documentary, “Take Your Pills”, a film about the rise of adderall within the United States, a quote that stuck out to me is “People used to use drugs to check out, but now they use drugs to check in.”. This is an exact representation as to what the mindset of this society has turned to as we’re seen as lazy or unsuccessful if we are not constantly working. With the rise of social media, many college-aged people are showing off their success while making others feel like they are failing if their lives are not looking the same. This may make many of us feel as though we need to use things such as study drugs to help us work harder and get ahead, but there’s also other outside influences such as music that may make us feel like it’s okay to experiment with these drugs. Over the years the mention of popping adderall and other drugs in music has grown in popularity and can be heard in songs such as these:

- A few second clips of lyrics from the songs: Adderall by Popp Hunna, Betrayed by Lil Xan, Burn by Juice Wrld

Something to understand about misusing stimulants and amphetamines is that they can lead to unintended consequences. Some of these side effects can include:

- Increased anxiety or other mental health impacts
- Feeling anxious or jittery
- Physical discomfort, including nausea and digestive issues
- Risk of seizure and cardiac event, especially if dosing isn’t managed by a healthcare provider
- Increased irritability
- Losing sleep, feeling fatigued
- Focusing on the wrong things- anything to avoid studying
- Becoming addicted or dependent on these stimulants

An important reminder is that these side effects can occur when stimulants are used with or without a prescription. If you are currently prescribed stimulants to treat a condition and are concerned about negative side effects, contact your healthcare provider.

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Discovering alternative strategies to study is important to combat the stress that comes with the heavy schedule of academics that we are all dealing with. Here are a few alternatives that may be helpful!-

- **Schedule your study sessions:** Try to plan your study during times of the day when you're feeling mentally sharp.
- **Prioritize subjects:** Prioritize what you study based on what will have the most impact on your final grade. Start with information you don't know as well. Remember it's okay to move onto other topics if you get stuck and come back later.
- **Reduce distractions:** Find ways to reduce distractions while studying! This can look like turning off your phone notifications or logging out of social media accounts. Once you hit a milestone in your assignment or studying, take a short break to check your feed or watch an episode of your favorite show as a reward before starting your studying again.
- **Go to bed at a reasonable time:** Plan on at least seven hours of sleep each night. If you find yourself staying up late and feeling groggy during the day, find time to fit a 15-20 minute power nap into your day- never feel bad about taking a nap if you need it! Sleep is important for memory, alertness, mood and motivation.
- **Start small:** Staring at a blank page can make it more difficult to get started and creating a plan with an outline can help overcome that roadblock. You can also break study guides into smaller chunks and work through them.
- **Set the mood:** Create an effective study environment or reserve a space to study in advance. Make sure you have all the supplies you need!
- **Maintain your energy:** Eat regularly and stay hydrated throughout the day- especially if you are preparing for exams.

Another concern to be on the lookout for is prescription pills being sold illegally that are laced with deadly doses of fentanyl. This drug is a synthetic opioid that is cheap to manufacture. Fentanyl is the deadliest drug threat in the United States and is a highly addictive synthetic opioid that is “50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine,” according to the DEA. If you can picture pinching just a few grains of sand between your fingers, that is a lethal dose of fentanyl. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, their laboratory found in 2022 that six out of ten fentanyl-laced fake prescriptions pills now contain a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl. An important thing to know is that a single pill can kill. If you are obtaining drugs from any source other than a licensed pharmacy or licensed dispensary, the risk of the drugs being laced with fentanyl is disturbingly high. To help combat against ingesting fentanyl, fentanyl testing strips are used to test substances to test whether or not fentanyl is detected. This is done by placing the

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substance in a small amount of water and letting it dissolve. To ensure you are not putting yourself at risk for consuming fentanyl, make sure to not buy drugs from unlicensed online pharmacies, off of social media, or from a friend or dealer.

In college it's so easy to get caught up in the stress of it all and feel as though you need to be performing at your best every second of the day. It's okay to take a step back and breathe when you are feeling overwhelmed, and realize that we are all trying our best at our own paces. Take the time you need to step away from the school work and spend some time doing something that you love! This has been the tenth episode of “In The Mix” with AOD, good luck everyone on your midterms and I will be back soon with more episodes for you all!