



PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND ALCOHOL: 5 **HARMFUL** COMBINATIONS



According to research done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, **64.8% of adults took prescription medication during the past year** (CDC, 2023). According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, **50.6% of U.S. adults consumed alcohol in the past month** (SAMHSA, 2025).

Why is that important?

Even though both of these activities are legal, they can still be dangerous, especially when combined. It's critical that a person who is using more than one substance understands the potential negative consequences of mixing drug classes.

What happens when alcohol is combined with commonly used prescription medication?

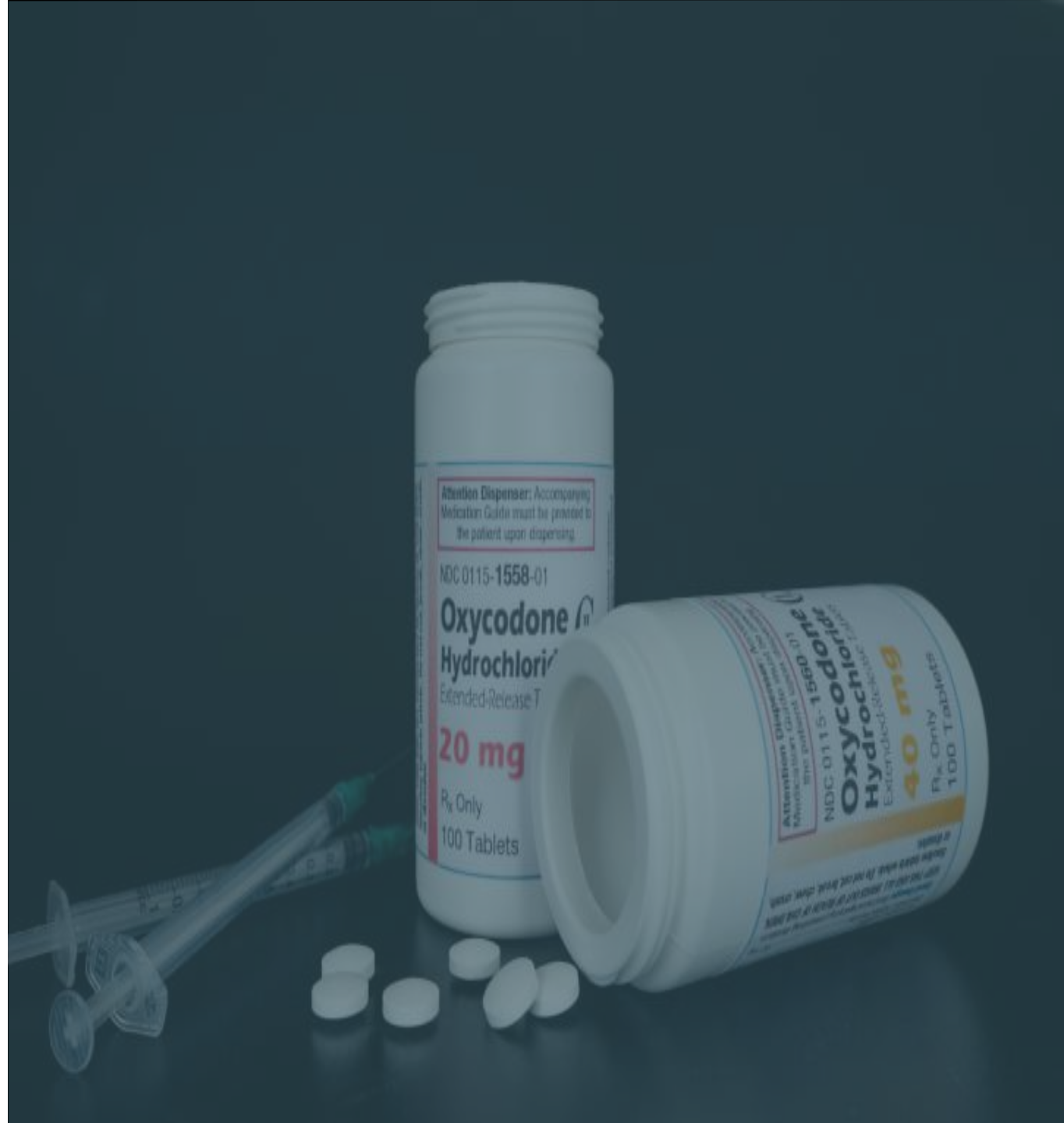
OPIOIDS

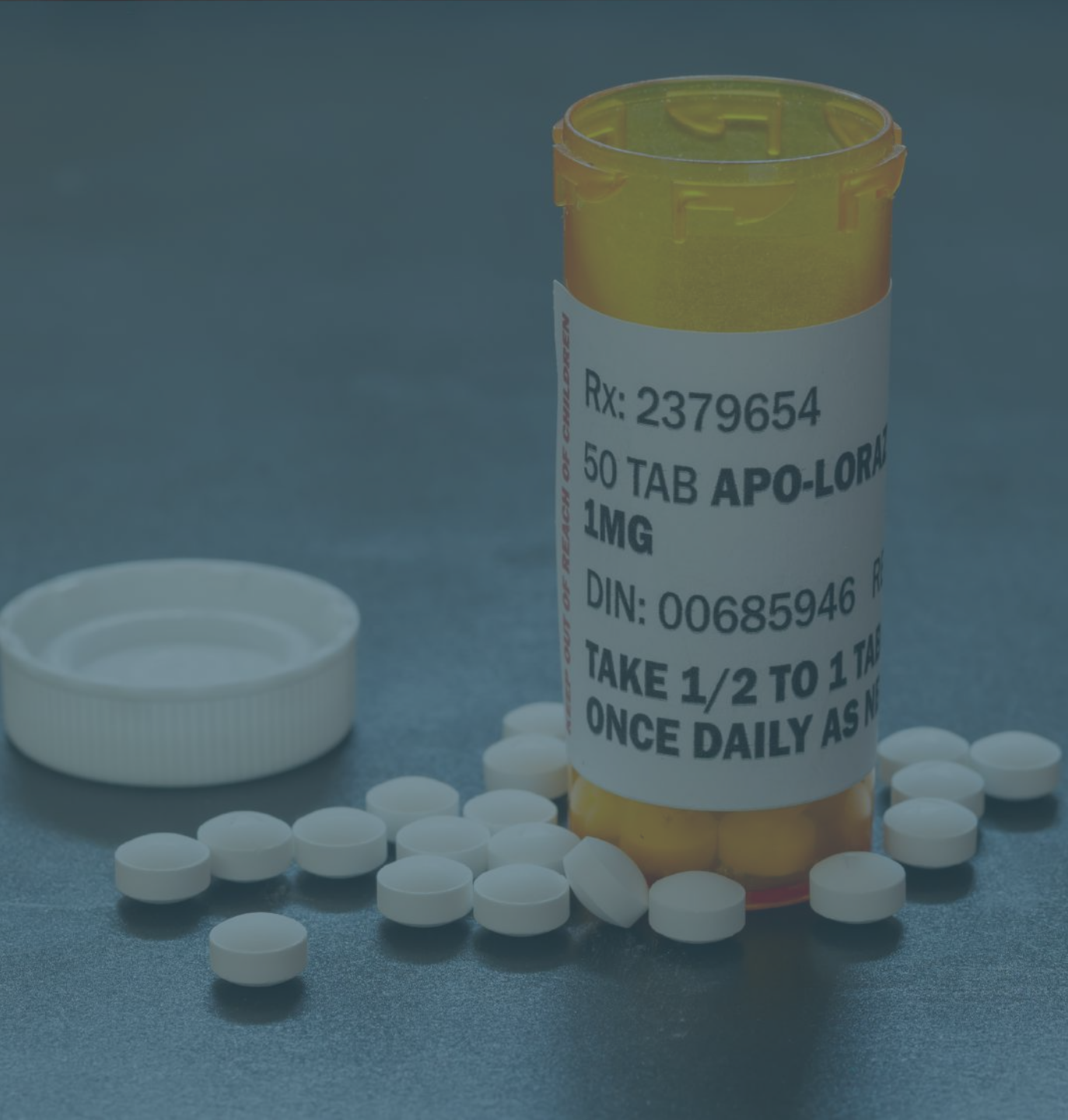
Opioids interrupt the pain messages in the receptors of the muscles, organs, or skin, in the spinal cord, and in the brain. They replace the body's natural "feel good" chemical and produce a chemical-induced sense of well being. Opioids include opioid prescription pain relievers, such as Oxycodone, OxyContin, Codeine, or Morphine.

6.9 MILLION

**Americans misused prescription opioids in 2025
(SAMHSA, 2026)**

- ❗ Opioids cause the user's breathing to slow. When combined with alcohol, side effects increase. It is also important to note that a person may not experience the same side effects each time they combine alcohol with opioids. A person could take depressants and opioids together one time and have no negative side effects, and could then





DEPRESSANTS

Depressants lower your body's basic functions and brain activity by “depressing” the nervous system. They usually cause a feeling of relaxation or drowsiness. Depressants include prescription tranquilizers, prescription sedatives, and inhalants. Alcohol is also classified as a depressant.

4.2 MILLION

**Americans misused prescription depressants in 2025
(SAMHSA, 2026)**

- ⓘ When alcohol is combined with another depressant drug, the effects are multiplied. The greatest immediate risk of using alcohol and another depressant drug is the increased risk of overdose.

STIMULANTS

Stimulants work on the brain and central nervous system to temporarily speed up, or “stimulate,” mental and physical processes. They usually increase alertness, mood, and energy. Stimulants include illegal drugs like cocaine, but also commonly prescribed medications such as Ritalin or Adderall, and caffeine.

3.9 MILLION

Americans misused prescription stimulants in 2025

(SAMHSA, 2026)

⚠ Alcohol and stimulants affect the body in different ways. Because stimulants can mask some of alcohol’s effects, a person may feel less impaired than they actually are. This can lead to consuming more and increase the risk of **poor coordination, impaired judgment, blackouts, accidents, and overdose.**

Mixing stimulants with alcohol can also put added stress on the heart and cardiovascular system, increasing heart rate and blood pressure and raising the risk of **heart attack, seizures, or stroke.**

The combination can also impair **decision-making, concentration, and awareness**, increasing the risk of unsafe behavior, accidents, and injuries.





HALLUCINOGENS

Hallucinogens affect thinking processes and perceptions, including a person's perceptions of time, distance and space. They may make the user see or feel things that aren't there or perceive them differently than they are. Hallucinogens are unpredictable and risky. Only one hallucinogen, Ketamine, has been approved for medical use, and in very restricted applications.

9.1 MILLION

**Americans misused hallucinogens in 2025
(SAMHSA, 2026)**

- ❗ Since the effects of hallucinogens are unpredictable, the ways in which hallucinogens will react with alcohol are also unpredictable. Ketamine is a hallucinogen but it also acts in the body as a depressant. Mixing ketamine with another depressant like alcohol intensifies the effects and the risks of overdose, slowed breathing or respiratory failure, and organ damage.

MARIJUANA

Although marijuana doesn't really fit into the "prescription drug" category, due to the rise in medical marijuana use, we felt that it would be valuable to include it here.

Marijuana doesn't easily fit into any one of these drug classes as it has depressant, stimulant, and hallucinogenic effects.

The hallucinogenic effects come from THC. The percentage of THC in marijuana can vary, depending on the type (i.e., concentrate, edible, etc.) or strain of the marijuana. CBD and some types of medical marijuana may have very little of the THC component.

61.6 MILLION

Americans used marijuana in 2025

(SAMHSA, 2026)

- ⚠ However, aside from the hallucinogenic effects, people also react differently to marijuana, with some experiencing more of the stimulant effects and others more of the depressant effects. This means that combining marijuana with alcohol can also have unpredictable effects. It can compound the depressant effects of alcohol, making overdose more likely. Or it can mask the depressant effects of alcohol, making the user more likely to consume higher and dangerous amounts of alcohol.



COURSE HIGHLIGHT: OTHER DRUGS

Other Drugs is a comprehensive course offered by 3rd Millennium Classrooms, designed specifically for individuals with current or past experiences with illicit drugs and/or prescription drug misuse. It can be used as an intervention resource for those who have a prescription or illicit drug violation, or as a preventative measure, especially for younger populations who may be facing peer pressure to start abusing drugs.

An effective prevention or intervention tool, Other Drugs focuses on the effects, risks, and consequences of drug misuse, with an emphasis on prescription drug misuse involving depressants, opiates, stimulants, and hallucinogens. The course highlights the impact of drug misuse in a motivational interviewing style. Other Drugs is designed to help individuals recognize and reflect upon their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors – and their influence on an individual's decision to use or misuse drugs.

An online, on-demand program, Other Drugs provides personalized feedback throughout the duration of the course as well as a confidential summary report upon course completion. In a counseling or coaching setting, this report can be used as a conversation starter to ignite discussion around the topic of drug misuse. **Other Drugs is a completely confidential resource that can be paired with other courses for offenders who may have multiple violations.**

Interested in using Other Drugs with your court or student referrals?
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