

Tough to Swallow

- Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the U.S. – there were 52,404 lethal drug overdoses in 2015. Opioid addiction is driving this epidemic, with 20,101 overdose deaths related to prescription pain relievers, and 12,990 overdose deaths related to heroin in 2015.
- In 2012, 259 million prescriptions were written for opioids, more than enough to give every American adult their own bottle of pills.
- In 2014, 94 percent of respondents in a survey of people in treatment for opioid addiction said they chose to use heroin because prescription opioids were “far more expensive and harder to obtain.”
- In 2015, 20.5 million Americans 12 or older had a substance use disorder – 2 million for prescription pain relievers, 591,000 for heroin.
- In 2015, 276,000 adolescents were current nonmedical users of pain relievers, with 122,000 having an addiction to prescription pain relievers. An estimated 21,000 adolescents had used heroin in the past year, and an estimated 5,000 were current heroin users. Additionally, an estimated 6,000 adolescents had a heroin use disorder in 2014.
- Four in five new heroin users started out misusing prescription painkillers; an estimated 23 percent of individuals who use heroin develop opioid addiction.
- People often share their unused pain relievers, unaware of the dangers of nonmedical opioid use. Most adolescents who misuse prescription pain relievers are given them for free by a friend or relative.
- The prescribing rates for prescription opioids among adolescents and young adults nearly doubled from 1994 to 2007.
- Women are more likely to have chronic pain, be prescribed prescription pain relievers, be given higher doses and use them for longer time periods than men. Women may become dependent on prescription pain relievers more quickly than men.