

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Drug for sleepyheads turns addiction tool for students

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New Delhi: Students burning the night oil may be a cause of concern today as many are learnt to be taking drugs to focus on studies. The favourite drug, according to doctors, is Modafinil, which is used to treat narcolepsy—a disorder that results in excessive sleep.

"It's not a trend yet, but we do come across patients who can't concentrate without the drug. In the process, some of them suffer from side-effects like lack of sleep," said Dr Rajesh Sagar, professor of psychiatry at AIIMS.

Dr Achal Bhagat, senior consultant psychiatrist at Apollo hospital added that parents must be observant about sudden behavioural changes in their children to spot drug abuse in time.

Dr J D Mukherji, senior director and head of neurology at Max Saket, said that medical students abuse Modafinil the most during exams.

"It is difficult to guess the number of such users because often the students do not admit to taking the drugs to stay awake. The revelation is

Why parents must be on guard

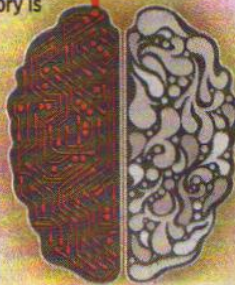


WHAT IS MODAFINIL

It is prescribed for narcolepsy or excessive sleep disorder. But increasingly, many students and professionals are using it to focus on studies/work and perform better

How it works

Its effect on brain isn't well understood. One theory is that it increases blood flow to areas in the brain that serve attention and learning. It might also enhance brain activity in areas thought to act as 'conductors' that manage skills like memory, reasoning and problem solving



SIDE-EFFECTS

Short term |

Nausea, headache, upset stomach and anxiety

Long term |

Addiction, lack of sleep, loss of appetite, depression and even suicide tendency

made during discussion when they face difficulty sleeping or headaches that are known side-effects," Mukherji said.

While it is illegal to sell the drug without prescription, a random survey by TOI revealed that chemist shops are willing to sell it over the counter. "It is available in two doses,

100mg and 200mg. The first will cost you Rs 102 for 10 tablets; the latter would cost Rs 205," said a central Delhi chemist.

Modafinil was approved for treating narcolepsy in the late 1990s. Later, doctors started prescribing it for people suffering from obstructive sleep apnea and depression too. However, its use among

healthy people has been debatable. A study published in the journal European Neuropsychopharmacology in 2015 stated that while most studies employing basic testing paradigms show that Modafinil intake enhances executive function, only half show improvements in attention and learning and memory, and a few even report impairments in divergent creative thinking.

"In contrast, when more complex assessments are used, Modafinil appears to consistently engender enhancement of attention, executive functions, and learning," it added.

"The problem with drug use to stay alert or awake is that you never know when you become dependent on them. I recently came across one such patient. He was prescribed Modafinil because he had pathological sleepiness for a few days. But he kept using it beyond prescription period and final got addicted to it. We are trying to get him off the medicine, but he has withdrawal symptoms," said a doctor, adding that over-the-counter sales of this drug must be stopped.

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TIMES BENGALURU

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It's Time Bengaluru United To Create Awareness Among Its Youths

Drug abuse by teenagers a growing cause for concern

Sunitha Rao R & Deepika Burli | TNN

Bengaluru: The growing menace of drug abuse by teenagers in the city has left doctors and parents worried. An increasing number of children, mostly teenagers, walking into hospitals with normal health issues are being found to be into substance abuse, with a majority of them addicted to cannabis and tobacco. Doctors blame loneliness, boredom and lack of productive engagement for teenagers taking to drugs.

Recently doctors at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health (IGICH) were shocked to find that an 11-year-old boy, who had convulsions almost every day, took drugs regularly.

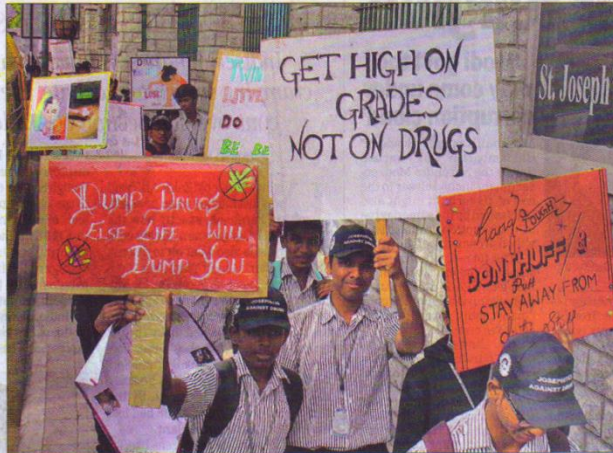
"While treating him we realized that he mimicked seizure, and showed abnormal behaviour and withdrawal symptoms. His urine samples tested positive for benzodiazepine and barbiturate," doctors at IGICH said.

It was only after the doctors explained the boy's parents about his abnormal behaviour and asked specific questions, they admitted that he was a drug addict. "When the boy used to live in a hostel for a year, his parents came to know of his addiction to drugs, following which they shifted him somewhere else," said the doctors.

According to Dr K John Vijay Sagar, additional professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at Nimhans, most parents are aware of the child's addiction to drugs, but sometimes even they come to know of it when he or she is taken to a hospital for some health condition.

The stigma of approaching a counsellor has led to the trend of general medical practitioners dealing with substance abuse cases. "Parents are ashamed to seek help thinking how would the school, teachers and relatives respond to the child's condition. Most who seek treatment do not return for follow up," said Dr Sagar.

"Nimhans gets five to six adolescents addicted to tobacco and at least two to cannabis every month. The cases of pre-adolescents taking drugs are rare, may be one or



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ARTIFICIAL CANNABIS DEADLY

Dr Mahesh R Gowda of Spandana Health Care and Rehabilitation Centre says that easy availability of lab-made synthetic cannabis is a bigger reason to worry. "The artificial cannabis is a chemical sprayed on dried leaves and smoked like a cigarette. It's prepared in lab, is more concentrated and can lead to convulsions and psychological breakdown," he said. Doctors and counsellors say the need of the hour "is to curb supply of drugs which is easily available across the city.

WAKE-UP CALL: About 700 students of St Joseph's Pre-University College took part in a walkathon in Bengaluru last week to create awareness about drug abuse by the young



two in a year," added Dr Sagar. Doctors say the easy availability of drugs is a serious cause for concern. Dr Mahesh R Gowda, psychiatrist and director, Spandana Health Care and Rehabilitation Centre, said that children on streets get addicted to sniffing glue, nail polish and petrol (sprayed on a piece of cloth) that has benzene aromatic compound. Children of caring families and concerned parents are saved

from the menace. "But those of nuclear families, who often suffer from boredom and loneliness, are most vulnerable. In many cases, the parents have no clue that their child is taking drugs. There is lack of playing, reading and together time in many homes, which make children vulnerable to drugs," said Dr Gowda. The psychiatric therapy for treatment of drug addiction in

children involves counselling, building confidence and self-esteem, family intervention, interaction with teachers, cognitive behaviour strategies and relapse prevention. But that will happen only when parents will come forward to seek help for their child.

ALL THAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Spend quality time with your child
- Keep tabs on your child's friends, and what they talk and see
- Encourage a friendly atmosphere at home and regularly interact with the child
- Love and warmth impact a child's growth and personality
- Engage your child in sports and extracurricular activities
- If the child has behavioural issues, seek professional help instead of hiding it
- When away from home, ask neighbours to keep tabs on the child's activity



Schools must keep a keen eye on students

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

It isn't just drugs like marijuana and cannabis that are making their way into the lifestyles of children, schools are finding an increasing number of children hooked to sniffing whiteners and glue.

School teacher Namratha Joshi (name changed) is more like a friend to her students who confide in her about every-

thing. She was stunned when a 12-year-old student recently asked her if she had tried marijuana.

"I was dumbstruck. I immediately informed the school authorities because even if the child wasn't taking the drug, we had to be on alert. It's scary when a young child knows what marijuana is," she said.

The fact that kids as young as 10 year olds are getting addicted to drugs is alarming. M Srinivasan, chairman of Gear Innovative International School, said that keeping a check on the school's support staff is crucial because sometimes their interactions with children can lead to unhealthy exchanges. "Even if there are rumours about drug exchange or consumption, we have to take them seriously and dig into it. Even though we have not had such a case so far, it is a matter of extreme concern for us," he said.

Schools believe that most children using drugs are innocent and try them out for fun or out of peer pressure. But there are other children whose socio-economic backgrounds play a crucial role. "Peddlers don't

target children who get a mere Rs 50 or so as pocket money. They trap those belonging to wealthy families, who have Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 with them all the time," said D Shashi Kumar of Karnataka Unaided Budget Schools' Association.

"Many children of well-to-do families are lonely when they return home from school, and try out drugs in the absence of parents," he added.

Tuition classes or somewhere else? Spending hours attending tuition classes after school may not be as productive as it's considered to be, say principals of various city schools.

Away from the eyes of their parents, many children who go for tuitions make unscrupulous purchases and get into drugs.

Being observant and alert is all that parents and schools can do. Manila Carvalho, principal of Delhi Public School (East), said the number of children into substance abuse was very small, but staying alert was imperative. "We look for signs and symptoms such as excessive drowsiness, fullness or mood swings in children, which often lead to drastic changes in their ability to cope with school work. Our in-house counsellors work on this and regularly speak to children," she said.

"We have not come across substance abuse case in our school so far, but it's very alarming as we do have students who spend a lot of time alone in their homes. They need someone to talk to and keep them away from such evils," Carvalho said.



