

The Cocktail Party



Mad in America

As a prescription drug and addiction expert for The O'Reilly Factor, Fox National News and many other news outlets, I am often called when a celebrity death occurs. While the loss of a talented actor or musician is tragic, I know from personal experience that the magnitude of devastation from legal drugs is happening to millions of innocent people – through psychoactive medications.

The use of psychiatric medications is at epidemic proportions within all age groups. Sleeping Pills, Benzodiazepines, Antidepressants, and Antipsychotics are prescribed for every symptom imaginable and while the pharmaceutical companies state in their product information that a 'discontinuation syndrome' and 'withdrawal' can occur, I don't think anyone is prepared for the horrific symptoms many of us face while trying to escape these drugs. I know first hand how dangerous they are.

"I Can't Sleep"

Three words spoken to my doctor began a horrifying decade of psychoactive pills. As I reached tolerance, the dosages were increased and additional medications added. After ten years my health declined horribly and, desperate to regain my life, I went to a treatment center and endured a cold-turkey withdrawal from Klonopin, Temazepam, Effexor, Sinequan, Ambien, Painkillers and Muscle Relaxers. To say I experienced 'withdrawals' is an understatement. My world shattered and I thought I was losing my mind. Never could I have been prepared for the intensity of withdrawals and each day I

survived was an accomplishment. It was many months before I surfaced out of the nightmare and even longer before I began healing.

Unfortunately the vast majority of people have no idea how any behavioral drug works or the potential repercussion of becoming dependent, and that was certainly the case for me. There was never a discussion with my psychiatrist of stopping the treatment and in fact there never was an exit strategy. I was not tested for vitamin deficiencies or other organic causes for my symptoms and it was years before mercury toxicity, anemia, low Vitamin D, B12, Folate and B6 were identified. Individually any one of these could have caused my insomnia.

I firmly believe that there should be an exit strategy and going cold-turkey as I did is not the answer – too many have tried only to reinstate and feel defeated. And for countless more, even a painfully slow taper from benzodiazepines is not enough to control the crushing symptoms. And while I am not anti-medication, I do feel that all medications, specifically psychoactive, are over-prescribed. We are now in a time when every generation is heavily drugged: what a frightening fact.

Benzodiazepines and Sleeping Pills work on GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid), the most prevalent receptor in the central nervous system. GABA is the great filter of the human body, calming and controlling the action of epinephrine, norepinephrine and dopamine, preventing stress-related messages from reaching the brain.

Benzodiazepines initially enhance GABA, creating a sense of calm, but with continued use (even short-term) the soothing effect of GABA is diminished and the excitatory neurotransmitter activity increases. Benzodiazepines increase pain, anxiety, depression, insomnia, muscle tightness, and alter how we view and engage the world. The systemic effect from benzodiazepine addiction affects every system of the body and can interfere with all activities of daily living.

While Sleeping Pills are considered “Non-Benzodiazepines,” they have the same side effect and withdrawal profile as Benzodiazepines and are known to worsen sleep issues with continued use. I consider Sleeping Pills just as dangerous as Benzodiazepines.

Antidepressants encompass many different formulations and primarily work on Serotonin, critical to the transmission of nerve impulses. Serotonin is also found in the pineal gland (responsible for melatonin production), blood platelets, digestive tract and brain. 95% of the body’s Serotonin is produced in the gut region. Continually high levels of Serotonin causes the stress hormones Cortisol and Adrenaline to be triggered by the adrenal glands causing issues of Adrenal Fatigue in many patients.

Antipsychotics are among the most profitable drugs in the United States and exert their effect on Dopamine, the neurotransmitter that relates to the sensation of pleasure. Dopamine also regulates virtually all bodily functions, including heartbeat, breathing, eye movement and is also critical for glucose control. Antipsychotics can cause tardive dyskinesia, an involuntary movement disorder that can be permanent, as well as being linked to extreme weight gain that leads to diabetes.

Psychoactive drugs – by their very classification – affect the mind, and they differ from any other medication in how they cross the blood-brain barrier and primarily act upon the central nervous system; altering thoughts, perception, consciousness, mood, cognition and behavior. It's no wonder that coming off of them can cause such systemic pain.

Individual psychiatric drugs can have serious side effects and withdrawal symptoms, and in combination with other psychoactive or other classes of medications can threaten respiratory and cardiac function in a lethal way. Polypharmacy, or the use of multiple medications, is a common occurrence and too often a combination of drugs can cause additional side effects that are then treated with more drugs. It's a vicious and dangerous cycle. I was on stomach medications, blood pressure meds, muscle relaxers, and painkillers, and with each specialist a new drug was added. Today I take no medications and all the pain, anxiety, depression, insomnia and other symptoms I suffered for years is gone. I've had 34 surgeries on my spine, legs and shoulder (from an auto accident), so for me to live drug-free is truly miraculous.

After regaining my life I could not turn from this issue and I've spent the last ten years helping the public withdraw from addictive pills with proper nutrition and supplementation to ease symptoms, in conjunction with a slow taper that allows the receptors time to readjust between reductions. Benzodiazepines require the slowest taper, with the taper for sleeping pills close in duration. Antidepressants can sometimes be withdrawn more rapidly but this depends on many factors including length of time on the drug, interactions with other medications and health challenges.

While I'm horrified at how medicine is being practiced today, and the way the pharmaceutical companies have created blockbuster drugs that target every possible life circumstance – that psychiatry then uses to promote this concept – I also know the general public must want more. We are culpable on this issue as we are too willing to accept a quick fix. I didn't put any effort into a good diet, exercise or seeking an answer to my symptoms. I took the pills and wanted to sleep immediately. Then the true horror began as my body became dependent. I paid the price for allowing so many medications into my body and it took tremendous dedication to regain my health and life. Maintaining good health is easy.

I have worked with people in every corner of the globe, and while many want their lives back and are willing to devote time and energy to making the necessary changes to heal, far too many resist healthier options. The advent of processed foods and fake drinks has created another type of addict and this mentality is destroying lives – yet many resist change. In order to regain our lives from psychoactive drugs it takes a willingness to eat better, exercise and slowly taper. Tapering alone is not enough to regain good health and I've met too many physicians that are frustrated with their patients, as too many want only pills.

So while it's easy to blame psychiatry, physicians and the drug companies, as consumers we dictate what stays on the market. The more we refuse psychoactive medications, the less they will be produced. As consumers we have the ultimate power and we have forgotten that our health is also our responsibility. I spent years in a state of decline, and without the willingness and dedication to return to life it wouldn't have happened. Getting off the addictive medications was but one step in a long process.

We've been fooled into believing that a quick fix substitutes for good health. We must be willing to devote time to healing. I lost ten years to a cocktail of psychoactive medications, and I was prepared to spend the same amount of time regaining my life. It took only a fraction of that time and each improvement drove me to continue the healing journey.

It is my hope that more will be willing to take charge of their lives and health. The end result is worth it. I'm living proof.

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