



## SIDE EFFECTS\*

- **AMNESIA**
- **MENTAL IMPAIRMENT**
- **DIFFICULTY FOCUSING**
- **DROWSINESS**

## DOSAGES

### PRESCRIBED DOSES

.25-1 mg daily

### ABUSE DOSES

2-4 mg daily

\*information courtesy of drugs.com

30%

OF MALE UPPERCLASSMEN HAVE SEEN SOMEONE TAKE XANAX AT SCHOOL

OF MALE UPPERCLASSMEN HAVE SEEN SOMEONE BUY/SELL IT AT SCHOOL

17%

\*\*based on a Harbinger survey of 338 students

#### \*NAMES CHANGED TO PROTECT IDENTITY

BY **EMILY FEY & LIZZIE KAHLE**  
*Assistant Print Editors*

It's 2 a.m. and junior Carter Wade\* stumbles through his front door. He's hours past his curfew, and 20 milligrams of Xanax past what his body can sustain. Wade doesn't remember being driven to a rehab center in a cop car. He wasn't aware his body was being loaded into an ambulance after he became unconscious in the backseat. He couldn't process that his heart was about to stop.

The defibrillators revived his heart, but not his memory – he learned of his brush with death the next morning from the police. They told him his heart had stopped due to the toxic amount of alcohol and Xanax he'd consumed, the same substances he'd been abusing for months. He never wants to touch it again he said.

"My initial reaction was like 'Holy s---, I died. That's serious.' Xanax is not something to mess around with."

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Xanax, a prescription drug which combats anxiety and panic disorders, has become a recreational drug used by teens. In a Harbinger poll of 341 East students, 18 percent have taken Xanax before, and of those who have taken it 55 percent did so without prescription. What was once stored in orange pill bottles in medicine cabinets is now being exchanged in Ziplock baggies in restroom stalls at school like junior Jeremy Jennings\*. People skip the prescription pills, instead opting to purchase "bars" – two milligrams of Xanax powder pressed into bars. Once "barred out," students achieve a buzz similar to the effects of alcohol or smoking.

"You take it and after about 15 minutes, you get really relaxed," senior Joe Swanson\* said. "If you're just on bars, it's just like you're chilling, kinda dumb, and you forget a lot of stuff. If you mix it with alcohol you won't remember s---, weed intensifies it."

This "party drug" as Jennings calls it, has been popularized by its accessibility. While it may be dealt in school, the pill can be popped just about anywhere. Xanax

is discrete. Odorless. Cheap. Students like Swanson are taking advantage of the ideal characteristics of Xanax in order to obtain a "buzz" similar to alcohol during class, without the fear of being caught due to smell or suspicion. Students take it to escape endless lectures and pointless presentations and instead, "don't give a f--- about a thing," as Jennings would say.

"A big part of it is that it is so easy," Wade said. "When you are smoking, it is easy to get caught, cause you smell and you actually have to smoke it. With the pill, you can do it in front of anybody. You don't have to think twice."

You'll have no weed left and you'll see a video of you stealing beet or something like that. You just stop caring and when you are messed up, you are just like 'why not drink,' or 'why not smoke.'

**CARTER WADE\***  
**JUNIOR**

Xanax, or Alprazolam, belongs to the family of benzodiazepines. These "benzos" slow down normal body functions, such as heart rate and breathing, according to Dr. Tama Sawyer, head of the Poison Control Center at the University of Kansas Health System.

Xanax can be found floating around "anywhere without cameras," according to Jennings. A poll taken of 338 students showed that 21 percent of students have been offered Xanax at school; 19 percent of those students actually took the pill.

Jennings takes the pass out of his class to go buy a bag of bars from the bathrooms and locker room. But inside East is not the only location you can find the drug. Junior Peter Stockton spent two hours a day looking up YouTube videos on how to access the Dark Web. After exchanging U.S. dollars for

Bitcoin, Stockton was able to buy Xanax for 25 cents a bar and ship it to an abandoned house he knew of. Swanson just gets it from his "boss."

During one lunch period, Swanson made \$175 dealing Xanax to students. According to Swanson, he probably deals to 10 students consistently within East and upwards of 200 outside of East. He turns a profit by selling the bars for nearly twice the normal rate; if he bought 100 bars for \$50, he would sell each for \$5, profiting \$150. According to him, he has the Xanax market of Kansas "locked down."

"My bosses have a Dark Web order coming in for me Monday," Swanson said. "I don't know how they do it, they just tell me they're getting like 5,000 bars for \$400."

Yet the drug's abuse continues after the 2:40 p.m. bell rings, whether it be at home, work or Saturday night parties. Once outside of school, Xanax is added to the long list of other drugs that students are able to obtain, which leads to lethal combinations.

According to Traci Tucci, a recovery advocate at the rehabilitation center First Call Recovery Center, people who misuse central nervous system depressants, or downers, are more likely to abuse other types as well, mainly alcohol.

When mixed, the two downers double the effects of the substances in the brain: Xanax intensifies the alcohol, while the alcohol intensifies the Xanax. Sawyer said since Xanax and alcohol affect the same areas of the brain, mixing them makes one more susceptible to memory loss or complete blackouts.

Wade and his friends start off by saying they are just going to relax – take one bar and have a "nice and easy night." But one bar turns to two or four. When they begin to feel careless, they being drinking and smoking. The next thing they know, it is 8 a.m., and the Ziplock bag that was filled with Xanax at the start of the night is empty, along with their memories – which according to Swanson, is part of the point.

"You'll have no weed left and you'll see videos of you stealing beer or something like that," Wade said. "You just stop caring

## XANAX DEFINED

A benzodiazepine used to treat anxiety and panic disorder

- **Slows brain activity**
- **Calming, tranquilizing effect**

and when you are that messed up, you are just like 'why not drink,' or 'why not smoke.' It just escalates to the point where you will do whatever."

Sawyer acknowledges that Xanax is a "fairly safe drug all by itself" in small, prescribed doses. But but she warns against mixing it will any other drug that makes you sleepy. The most popular combination she sees is Xanax and alcohol. According to www.promises.com, a rehabilitation center, more than 95 percent of drug deaths from Xanax involved other drugs, with an average of more than two additional drugs.

Those who have anxiety disorders, like senior Scheele Prust, are prescribed minimal amounts of the drug and still feel its effects. After experiencing panic attacks throughout middle school and early high school, her psychiatrist prescribed her with a quarter milligram of Xanax to be taken as needed. A bar of Xanax is eight times that amount.

On a flight home from Los Angeles, Prust took a prescribed dose of Xanax to prevent a panic attack. With just a quarter milligram in her system, she was finally relaxed and slept for the whole flight. She "can't image what a whole bar would do to you."

"Teenagers tend to have the idea that one is good, two will be better, three will be better, you know, more is better," Sawyer said. "That is not the case when you are dealing with drugs: more is not better – it's more dangerous."

At first, Stockton was taking one or two bars at a party on the weekend. What he thought was just casual use quickly transcended into popping four to five per day, at any location or time he needed it. If one bar wasn't doing enough, he would take another until his body returned him to the calm, relaxed state he felt while on the drug. For nearly two months, he described himself as addicted.

Sawyer explained that the more abusers take the drug, the higher their tolerance gets. Abusers have to increase their intake in order to get the same desired effects.

"At the point where I was taking four to five bars a day, my tolerance had been so high and it became dangerous when I mixed it with alcohol," Stockton said. "I finally was like 'I need to be done.' I have been clean for five days now [at the time of the interview]."

It took him two straight months of blacked-out weekends before he worked up the courage to show his mom and counselor all of his Xanax. But quitting Xanax cold isn't as simple as throwing away his pill stash for Stockton.

His mom and rehab specialists wanted him to go on a hospital IV for three days. Stockton wanted to sober up on his own. Xanax is a short-term drug according to Sawyer, and Stockton's abuse has left him with withdrawals, as many drugs do, now that he is off the drug. He gets an average of three to

four hours of sleep a night. His head constantly pounding, his body jittery and shaky. The hallucinations come and go.

"Going off Xanax is like a bad acid trip," Stockton said. "It's hell."

On top of the normal dangers of ingesting the drug, Corporal Joel Porter of the Prairie Village Police Department recognizes the dangers of buying Xanax from an unknown source. In the last few years, Porter has seen instances of "people attempting to purchase one drug and being sold something completely different and overdosing on the unknown substance."

After Wade's near death experience, doctors conducted a drug test to determine what he had taken in the hours prior. The results showed traces of Xanax in his system.

It also showed traces of drugs Wade can't imagine himself taking. He had bought the pills at a party that night from someone he knew, never questioning their credibility.

"It's not that hard to buy pill presses," Tucci said. "You can get them on Amazon. It's a really scary reality. So you have somebody out there that wants to turn a profit so they sell 'Xanax' bars, and press it with whatever drug. It clearly can be very dangerous."

Even if recreational Xanax doesn't lead to blackouts and hospital visits, the effect on the mind and body can be long term. According to Sawyer, taking anxiety medication without a prescription can actually lead to extreme anxiety and panic disorders. How Xanax will work on each person is impossible to determine.

"Right now, your mind is as fresh and new as it can possibly be," Sawyer said. "You have the possibility to learn so much, so the fact that you would jeopardize it by taking something like Xanax that makes it difficult to learn or achieve your goals is really a social problem...This is not the time to experiment with drugs at all."

*Xanax, a prescription drug, is now being used by teens in recreational circumstances despite the drug's harmful side effects*