



**Taking downers to relax is like nailing a pillow over a smoke detector in a house that's on fire.**



■ **Sticky Stuff**

One of the main things that keep downers a long way away from perfect is the risk of dependence.

What's **that**? It's the mental and physical **Krazy Glue** that keeps people stuck when they begin to depend on something to help them cope.

That something might be downers, beer, or Triple Mocha Madness ice cream. In fact, it doesn't matter much what *it* is: If you *have* to have it to get through the day (or night), you've usually got a problem.

And while some dependencies are worse than others (Triple Mocha Madness is a bigger problem for a fat person than a skinny one), drug problems are just about the biggest problem going.

One reason is that users become addicted to the drugs they use, which means they get sick or feel rotten if they stop taking it. And while they're stuck to their particular Krazy Glue, their other problems can get worse. Often, they get a *lot* worse.

That's why taking downers to relax is like nailing a pillow over a smoke detector in a house that's on fire. The pillow **might** keep you from being bothered by the noise of the smoke detector, but it won't do zip to keep your house from burning down.

Other downer dangers involve the risk of overdose — which happens if you take too many pills or mix downers with alcohol.

Either way, a depressant drug overdose is dangerous, even deadly. In fact, with downers, the line between getting down and getting dead can be so narrow that some people never notice it at all.



Do It Now Foundation's  
**Believe It Or Else!**  
Total number of tranquilizer prescriptions issued each year in the U.S. (in millions):  
**79**

Source: Drug Topics (March 2002)



■ **Rap Up**

So what's the final rap on downer drugs? Well, there's no simple one, that's for sure. Because in spite of all the problems they cause, downer drugs can be a good thing for some people.



Used carefully for a short time under a doctor's supervision, downers can help people cope with serious stress until they can learn to relax and solve their problems on their own.

Still, they're not for everybody. In fact, they're not even for most people.

That's because even the best tranquilizer doesn't work as well as we do at reducing stress or putting ourselves away in dreamland — the everyday way.

So unless a doctor tells you that you have to take them, it's a good idea to stay as far away from downers as you can.



They're a short cut that can turn out to be the biggest **trap** you ever walk, run, or fall into. ■

This is one in a series of publications on drugs, behavior, and health published by Do It Now Foundation. Please call or write for a list of current titles, or check out our web site at [www.doinow.org](http://www.doinow.org).



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**Downer drugs**  
an inside guide to the downside's flipside



## ■ Short Cuts & Detours

Sometimes it seems like the only thing we all have in common is our fascination with short cuts. Whether it's the shortest, **Do-Not-Pass-Go** straight line to bailing out of school in the afternoon or the quickest way to cram for tomorrow's history exam, we're all experts at the *same thing* — looking for the fastest way to do all the stuff that life throws at us in the easiest way possible.

That's one reason that downer drugs are so widely used today.

From a distance, they look like a perfect short cut past the nervousness and tension and funky feelings that we'd all rather live without. But they only *look* that way from a distance.

In fact, the closer you look at downers, the more they look like a big fat ticket to nowhere at all.

That's why we put together this pamphlet: to bring you up to date, quickly and painlessly (more or less), on what you need to know about one of the most common drug groups in America today — downers, or depressants.

And whether you know it or not, it's information you really do need to know.

Because, sometimes, short cuts are the longest detours any of us ever take.

## ■ Getting Small

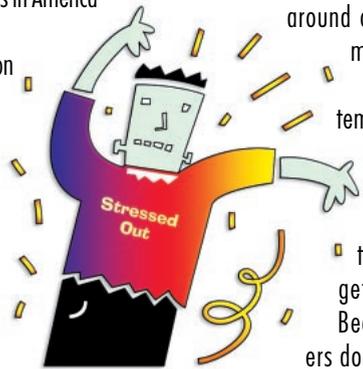
So what are downers?

Technically, any chemical that slows down the brain and central nervous system is a depressant drug.

But to keep things simple, we're going to shrink that definition a little, and define "downers" as a group of drugs used to relieve tension or induce sleep.

This leaves out drugs that cause similar effects, like alcohol and heroin — because they're usually used for other reasons and cause different problems.

On the other hand, it lumps dozens of unrelated drugs together that are more alike than different, both in the way they're used and the effects they cause.



**Untightening Uprightness.** Downers are used by people who need help to relax — or think they do.

## Downers depress (or slow down) nerve cells inside the brain and central nervous system.



## ■ Brain Drain

The main effect of downers is to turn **down** (or *depress*) the level of arousal in the brain by slowing down the firing of nerve cells in the central nervous system.

Still, slowing down the firing of nerve cells is only the start of what downers do.

Because our brains and nervous systems aren't just sort of *there*, cluttering up our heads and strung around our bones, like lights on a Christmas tree.

They're a perfectly matched system that generates all our feelings, thoughts, and actions.

When downers get thrown into the mix, things do more than just get slow. They can also get stupid, fast.

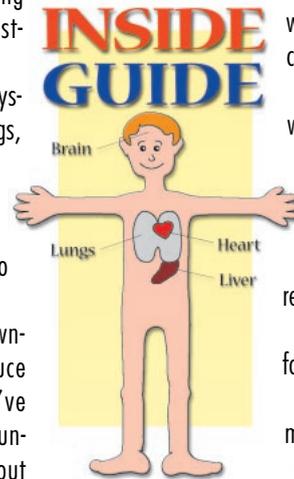
Because two more things that downers do is dull thinking ability and reduce inhibitions — which is fine, if you've thought yourself into a stressed-out, unhappy corner, and need help getting out again.

On the other hand, it's not particularly great if you're basically normal and just want to get wasted.

Doing stupid things — even stuff you normally wouldn't — can seem like a great idea when you're zonked out on downers.

Hey, maybe *that's* why they call it **wasted**.

**Down the hatch.** Downers slow down the brain and central nervous system, but affect other body systems, too, including the lungs, heart, and liver.



## ■ Chill Pills

It's because of their ability to ease anxiety and wipe away the worries that keep people awake at night that downers are most often prescribed today — as tranquilizers and sleeping pills.

In fact, tranquilizers are one of the most prescribed groups of drugs in America. Examples include Valium®, Librium®, and Xanax®.

The list of most-prescribed sleeping pills includes such drugs as Dalmane®, Halcion®, and Restoril®.

Still, just because doctors prescribe them doesn't mean downers are good for you or harmless.

They're not. In fact, when they're misused, downers can cause big problems — even

what most of us consider Big Problem Numero Uno: death.

They do it thousands of times a year, especially when they're used with alcohol.

In fact, if you're still fuzzy about how downers affect people, think of alcohol. It does a lot of the same things that downers do — easing nervousness and tension, eventually even causing the most rested drinker to fall asleep.

Because of its depressant effects, alcohol was used for centuries as a medicine.

But since it's poisonous, or toxic (think maybe that's where the word intoxication comes from?), it also causes effects that are bad for health.

*That's* the reason alcohol isn't used much in medicine anymore. And that's why the depressant drugs are.

As short-cuts go, they turned out to be better — or, at least, more predictable and less messy — than booze.

But they're still a long way from perfect.



**Seriously stupid.** Downers can make it hard to think straight — or even to think much at all.

