

Brief

# Performance Enhancer?

The use of stimulants to stay awake and study has long been a part of college life, especially around exam time. But now, a dispatch from the *New York Times News Service* (Aug. 1, 2005) says that the reliance on prescription stimulants to enhance performance has risen, becoming almost as commonplace as No-Doz, Red Bull, and maybe even caffeine. As many as 20 percent of college students have used Ritalin or Adderall to study, write papers, and take exams, according to recent surveys focused on individual campuses.

One of the factors driving the use of such drugs is that students have become convinced that it will help them achieve academic success, according to Robert A. Winfield, M.D., director of University Health Service at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, who sees a growing number of students who falsely claim to be Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) sufferers so they can get a prescription. But Laurence Greenhill, Ph.D., a clinical psychiatrist at the university, told the *Times* that the idea that Adderall is a performance enhancer is a myth. "It won't increase your intelligence; it just increases your diligence," he said. "Essentially, the drugs delay the onset of sleep so you can stay up all night and cram."

Much like performance-enhancing drugs in professional sports, the spread of prescription stimulants among college students is raising issues of competitiveness and fairness. But, according to the *Times*, interviews and e-mail exchanges with two dozen students at Columbia University suggest that "the prevailing ethos is that Adderall is a legitimate and even hip way to get through the rigors of a hectic academic and social life." ■

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