



ADDICTION SCIENCE SERIES

Dextromethorphan (“DXM”, “skittles”, “3C”)

Dextromethorphan is a cough suppressant that is widely found in over-the-counter cold medications (e.g., Benylin, Delsym, Robitussin DM and Vicks 44). A powdered form of dextromethorphan is also sold illegally over the Internet, where directions for extracting DXM from cold medications may be found as well. On the street, DXM intoxication is often called “Robotripping” or “skittling”.

In low doses, DXM can induce feelings of drowsiness and relaxation, but as the dose increases beyond the recommended level, it can act very differently. Larger doses of DXM act very much like the dissociative anesthetics such as PCP and ketamine. Users may experience what seem to them to be a heightened sense of perceptual awareness, as well as altered time perception. Some individuals who take large doses of DXM will display hyper-excitability, lethargy, ataxia, slurred speech, sweating, hypertension, and/or nystagmus. In some cases, users may become severely disoriented, fearful and anxious.

Side effects of DXM include allergic reactions: hives; difficulty breathing; swelling of your face, lips, tongue, or throat. More serious side effects include severe dizziness, hallucinations and respiratory depression.

DXM Use Disorders

DXM has a low addiction potential because it does not appear to interact with the brain’s reward pathway or to have particularly desirable sedating or energizing qualities. However, adolescents and others with limited income may particularly be drawn to dextromethorphan simply due to the ease of acquisition and its low cost. Some users do display the classic signs of a substance use disorder, and in rare cases may require treatment of such a disorder or self-management strategies that lead to abstinence.