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Using friend's muscle relaxant — Safe? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I originally took a muscle relaxer because I was experiencing very bad back pain and could not sleep. I was not prescribed the muscle relaxers. My friend suggested I take one of hers. So I did, and now I will take one sometimes before bed if I can't fall asleep or if I want to actually just relax. It makes me just want to sleep, and I feel really calm after taking one. Is this bad that I take them for this reason? What are the side effects? Is it harmful?

Sincerely,
Miss Dazed and Confused

Answer

Dear Miss Dazed and Confused,

Because your question touches on a few topics, it may be helpful to tease apart the distinct (but related) parts. You ask whether it's okay to take a muscle relaxant to relieve pain and to aid in getting to sleep when needed; there are approved medications available for each of these issues. However, taking prescription medications that aren't prescribed specifically for you can pose risks to your health (more details on this later). You also ask about taking medication for the purpose of relaxing or getting to sleep. While using this medication might help you do this, there are a number of alternative ways to help feel relaxed without taking a pill. To minimize any potential risks to your health, speaking with a health care provider who's familiar with your personal health history may provide a tailored treatment plan to effectively and safely treat your back pain and sleep concerns.

While you may think that your friend is doing you a favor, taking a prescription drug that's prescribed for someone else (even if the two of you share the same condition) or taking a prescription drug for a purpose other than indicated is referred to as drug misuse ^[2]. This behavior can also include taking a drug at a different dosage than prescribed (e.g., taking two pills at a time instead of one, as prescribed) or in a different method (e.g., grinding up and snorting a drug that was prescribed to be taken orally). When a health care provider prescribes a medication, they check the patient's medical history to see if a medication is appropriate to prescribe. Additionally, they review current medications to see if there could be any potentially

hazardous drug interactions. Therefore, if you take a friend's prescription medication, you may be putting yourself at risk for harmful interactions. Beyond being unsafe, it may also be good for you to know that it's illegal to take someone else's prescription medication. For all these reasons, health care providers are encouraged to educate patients not to share their drug prescriptions with friends and family.

Another issue to consider is that all drugs carry potential risk to the user's health — prescription or not. In the case of muscle relaxants, they're known to be addictive. That's one of the reasons they're a controlled substance. Medications like these — even ones that are prescribed frequently — require oversight to help prevent addiction. Even if you *are* prescribed a muscle relaxant, it could be worth asking your health care provider about alternative methods of pain relief that pose less of a dependency risk. Other side effects of muscle relaxants are weakness, fatigue, dizziness, or dry mouth. Driving a vehicle or operating large, heavy machinery can be unsafe while using this type of medication. Additionally, using muscle relaxants in conjunction with other substances that are also central nervous system depressants (including antihistamines, sedatives, tranquilizers, cold medicines, alcohol, and narcotics) may compound the effects of the drug. If you're still experiencing back pain, consider making an appointment to discuss this and see what could be done to help, such as over-the-counter medications or certain exercises.

Lastly, you mention that one of the benefits of taking the muscle relaxant was feeling calm and sleepy. There are many different ways you could consider to relax before bed without meds. Try making your favorite warm beverage such as herbal tea or hot cocoa with extra marshmallows, snuggling under a fuzzy blanket with your most comfy pajamas, and listening to soothing music. If you're well enough to be active and your back isn't in jeopardy, consider trying a workout class or a long, brisk walk to tire you out before bed. Another option might be yoga; it could be just the ticket to center and calm your mind, and help bring you toward a place of inner serenity. If you *really* want to treat yourself, buying yourself a gift like a massage or getting acupuncture might also be options to help reduce tension and get you to that calm, blissed out place. For some other tips on relaxing and falling asleep, it may help to check out the [Sleep](#) ^[3] category *Go Ask Alice!* [General Health](#) ^[4] archives.

Here's to helping you find relief safely and get to sleep soundly!

Alice!

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