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The Fatal Chemical Reaction

The Tampa Tribune

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Regarding "Report: Ex-Buc Used Cocaine Before Death" (Metro, May 29):

Another tragic overdose has been reported with "a narcotic pain reliever and cocaine." Let's teach your readers how this happens.

The common stimulant drugs - cocaine, crystal meth, Ritalin and Adderall - are short-acting and they keep a person awake. The common narcotic drugs - oxycontin, vicodin and methadone - are long-acting and make the brain sleepy, including the part of the brain that drives the reflex to breathe. When the stimulants wear off first, the narcotics are unopposed, and the person stops breathing. Four minutes later, death occurs. If alcohol and Xanax are involved, the sedative effects of the narcotics last even longer.

That's why so many of these deaths involve three types of drugs: narcotics, stimulants and sedatives. But it is always the narcotics that bring the cruel kiss of death.

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