

SEVENTY-THREE thousand pills in four years! That's the incredible extent of Nicole Richie's drug abuse and the real reason she was forced to go into rehab recently, an ENQUIRER investigation reveals.

The troubled 25-year-old has been gobbling a staggering average of 50 pills a day — 25 each of the painkiller Vicodin and the muscle relaxant Soma, say friends close to her.

Trapped in a downward spiral of drug addiction, an emaciated and pregnant Nicole entered rehab at southern California's Beau Monde treatment center and underwent three days of detox before continuing treatment for drug abuse and anorexia as an outpatient.

Nicole went in on May 11 and was skin and bones, weighing only 83 pounds. "Her eyes were glassy. She was weak, confused and in tears" at the time, said a friend.

Nicole made the decision to detox after a home pregnancy test revealed she was pregnant — a development first reported by The ENQUIRER.

Her boyfriend, "Good Charlotte" rocker Joel Madden, "threatened to leave her if she didn't do something about her addiction," said the friend.

Nicole is notorious as a cokehead and boozer on the L.A. party scene, sources say.

And in a recent interview, the former bodyguard of Lindsay Lohan recalled the two getting together for massive cocaine

hoovering it all up, then piling more on," Weaver revealed.

"After 10 hours I had enough and threatened to throw the mirror out the window. I had to carry her (Lindsay) out to the car."

DESPITE NICOLE'S DRUG history (see story at left), Nicole's family and even most of her close friends had no idea she was downing up to 50 pills a day of Soma and Norco, a Vicodin variant containing acetaminophen, said an insider.

And when she told her boyfriend Joel that she was pregnant, he gave her a "get-help-or-we're-through" ultimatum, sources say.

"Over the past year, Nicole has managed to cur-

tail her drug use," explained the insider. "When she entered Beau Monde, she was down to five Vicodin and five Soma pills per day.

"She finally seems determined to get clean and sober for good. She knows if she doesn't, she could lose her relationship, her baby and her life."

by **ROBIN MIZRAHI**
and **PATRICIA SHIPP**



She finally seems determined to get clean and sober for good...she knows she could lose her life

binges. "Nobody was as wild as Lindsay. But Nicole came close," bodyguard Lee Weaver told a British newspaper.

During one 10-hour toot, the two girls snorted a "mountain" of coke, he said.

"They carried in a mirror from the bedroom, laid it on a coffee table and emptied a mountain of coke on it. They went at the stuff with straws,

THE scope of Nicole Richie's drug abuse — 50 pills a day for four years — seems almost impossible. But a nationally known addiction specialist tells The ENQUIRER that it is not only possible, it's also commonly seen among drug addicts.

"Seasoned addicts, who have abused painkillers for years, can develop a huge tolerance and take extremely large amounts of these drugs without overdosing," Dr. James Cocores told The ENQUIRER.

"For instance, Rush Limbaugh, when he was addicted, was reportedly taking more pain pills than Nicole every day — including the extremely powerful painkiller OxyContin."

NICOLE WAS TAKING 25 PILLS EACH of Vicodin and Soma.

"Even physically small people like Nicole

Fifty pills a day *common* for addicts

Richie can require large numbers of pills every day just to function — amounts that would easily kill a normal person," said Dr. Cocores, who practices in Boca Raton, Fla.

"The large number of pills Nicole was taking shows the scope of her addiction," declared the expert, who has not treated Richie.

"Long-term use can produce physical dependence and addiction. Once this occurs, slowing or stopping drug use causes unpleasant withdrawal symptoms, including restlessness, body pain, insomnia and general malaise."

by **REGINALD FITZ**