

DRUGS

These days, drugs can be found everywhere, and it may seem like everyone's doing them. Lots of people are tempted by the excitement or escape that drugs seem to offer.

But learning the facts about drugs can help you see the risks of chasing this excitement or escape. Here's what you need to know.

The Deal on Substances

Thanks to medical and drug research, there are thousands of drugs that help people. Antibiotics and vaccines have revolutionized the treatment of infections. Medicines can lower blood pressure, treat diabetes, and reduce the body's rejection of new organs. Medicines can cure, slow, or prevent disease, helping us to lead healthier and happier lives. But there are also lots of illegal, harmful drugs that people take to help them feel good or have a good time.

How do drugs work? Drugs are chemicals or substances that change the way our bodies work. When you put them into your body (often by swallowing, inhaling, or injecting them), drugs find their way into your bloodstream and are transported to parts of your body, such as your brain. In the brain, drugs may either intensify or dull your senses, alter your sense of alertness, and sometimes decrease physical pain.

A drug may be helpful or harmful. The effects of drugs can vary depending upon the kind of drug taken, how much is taken, how often it is used, how quickly it gets to the brain, and what other drugs, food, or substances are taken at the same time. Effects can also vary based on the differences in body size, shape, and chemistry.

Although substances can feel good at first, they can ultimately do a lot of harm to the body and brain. Drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, taking illegal drugs, and sniffing glue can all cause serious damage to the human body. Some drugs severely impair a person's ability to make healthy choices and decisions. Teens who drink, for example, are more likely to get involved in dangerous situations, such as driving under the influence or having unprotected sex.

Why People Take Drugs

And just as there are many kinds of drugs available, there are as many reasons for trying them or starting to use them regularly. People take drugs just for the pleasure they believe they can bring. Often it's because someone tried to convince them that drugs would make them feel good or that they'd have a better time if they took them.

Some teens believe drugs will help them think better, be more popular, stay more active, or become better athletes. Others are simply curious and figure one try won't hurt. Others want to fit in. A few use drugs to gain attention from their parents.

Many teens use drugs because they're depressed or think drugs will help them escape their problems. The truth is, drugs don't solve problems — they simply hide feelings and problems. When a drug wears off, the feelings and problems remain, or become worse. Drugs can ruin every aspect of a person's life

Here are the facts on some of the more common drugs.

Alcohol

The oldest and most widely used drug in the world, alcohol is a depressant that alters perceptions, emotions, and senses.

How It's Used: Alcohol is a liquid that is drunk.

Effects & Dangers:

- Alcohol first acts as a stimulant, and then it makes people feel relaxed and a bit sleepy.
- High doses of alcohol seriously affect judgment and coordination. Drinkers may have slurred speech, confusion, depression, short-term memory loss, and slow reaction times.
- Large volumes of alcohol drunk in a short period of time may cause alcohol poisoning.

Addictiveness: Teens who use alcohol can become psychologically dependent upon it to feel good, deal with life, or handle stress. In addition, their bodies may demand more and more to achieve the same kind of high experienced in the beginning. Some teens are also at risk of becoming physically addicted to alcohol. Withdrawal from alcohol can be painful and even life threatening. Symptoms range from shaking, sweating, nausea, anxiety, and depression to hallucinations, fever, and convulsions.

Amphetamines

Amphetamines are stimulants that accelerate functions in the brain and body. They come in pills or tablets. Prescription diet pills also fall into this category of drugs.

Street Names: speed, uppers, dexies, bennies

How They're Used: Amphetamines are swallowed, inhaled, or injected.

Effects & Dangers:

- Swallowed or snorted, these drugs hit users with a fast high, making them feel powerful, alert, and energized.
- Uppers pump up heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure, and they can also cause sweating, shaking, headaches, sleeplessness, and blurred vision.
- Prolonged use may cause hallucinations and intense paranoia.

Addictiveness: Amphetamines are psychologically addictive. Users who stop report that they experience various mood problems such as aggression, anxiety, and intense cravings for the drugs.

Cocaine and Crack

Cocaine is a white crystalline powder made from the dried leaves of the coca plant. Crack, named for its crackle when heated, is made from cocaine. It looks like white or tan pellets.

Street Names for Cocaine: coke, snow, blow, nose candy, white, big C

Street Names for Crack: freebase, rock

How They're Used: Cocaine is inhaled through the nose or injected. Crack is smoked.

Effects & Dangers:

- Cocaine is a stimulant that rocks the central nervous system, giving users a quick, intense feeling of power and energy. Snorting highs last between 15 and 30 minutes; smoking highs last between 5 and 10 minutes.
- Cocaine also elevates heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, and body temperature.
- Injecting cocaine can give you hepatitis or AIDS if you share needles with other users. Snorting can also put a hole inside the lining of your nose.
- First-time users — even teens — of both cocaine and crack can stop breathing or have fatal heart attacks. Using either of these drugs even one time can kill you.

Addictiveness: These drugs are highly addictive, and as a result, the drug, not the user, calls the shots. Even after one use, cocaine and crack can create both physical and psychological cravings that make it very, very difficult for users to stop.

Cough and Cold Medicines (DXM)

Several over-the-counter cough and cold medicines contain the ingredient dextromethorphan (also called DXM). If taken in large quantities, these over-the-counter medicines can cause hallucinations, loss of motor control, and "out-of-body" (or disassociative) sensations.

Street Names: triple C, candy, C-C-C, dex, DM, drex, red devils, robo, rojo, skittles, tussin, velvet, vitamin D

How They're Used: Cough and cold medicines, which come in tablets, capsules, gel caps, and lozenges as well as syrups, are swallowed. DXM is often extracted from cough and cold medicines, put into powder form, and snorted.

Effects & Dangers:

- Small doses help suppress coughing, but larger doses can cause fever, confusion, impaired judgment, blurred vision, dizziness, paranoia, excessive sweating, slurred speech, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, headache, lethargy, numbness of fingers and toes, redness of face, dry and itchy skin, loss of consciousness, seizures, brain damage, and even death.
- Sometimes users mistakenly take cough syrups that contain other medications in addition to dextromethorphan. High doses of these other medications can cause serious injury or death.

Addictiveness: People who use cough and cold medicines and DXM regularly to get high can become psychologically dependent upon them (meaning they like the feeling so much they can't stop, even though they aren't physically addicted).

Depressants

Depressants, such as tranquilizers and barbiturates, calm nerves and relax muscles. Many are legally available by prescription (such as Valium and Xanax) and are bright-coloured capsules or tablets.

Street Names: downers, goof balls, barbs, ludes

How They're Used: Depressants are swallowed.

Effects & Dangers:

- When used as prescribed by a doctor and taken at the correct dosage, depressants can help people feel calm and reduce angry feelings.

- Larger doses can cause confusion, slurred speech, lack of coordination, and tremors.
- Very large doses can cause a person to stop breathing and result in death.
- Depressants and alcohol should never be mixed — this combination greatly increases the risk of overdose and death.

Addictiveness: Depressants can cause both psychological and physical dependence.

Ecstasy (MDMA)

This is a designer drug created by underground chemists. It comes in powder, tablet, or capsule form. Ecstasy is a popular club drug among teens because it is widely available at raves, dance clubs, and concerts.

Street Names: XTC, X, Adam, E, Roll

How It's Used: Ecstasy is swallowed or sometimes snorted.

Effects & Dangers:

- This drug combines a hallucinogenic with a stimulant effect, making all emotions, both negative and positive, much more intense.
- Users feel a tingly skin sensation and an increased heart rate.
- Ecstasy can also cause dry mouth, cramps, blurred vision, chills, sweating, and nausea.
- Sometimes users clench their jaws while using. They may chew on something (like a pacifier) to relieve this symptom.
- Many users also experience depression, paranoia, anxiety, and confusion. There is some concern that these effects on the brain and emotion can become permanent with chronic use of ecstasy.
- Ecstasy also raises the temperature of the body. This increase can sometimes cause organ damage or even death.

Addictiveness: Although the physical addictiveness of Ecstasy is unknown, teens who use it can become psychologically dependent upon it to feel good, deal with life, or handle stress.

GHB

GHB, which stands for gamma hydroxybutyrate, is often made in home basement labs, usually in the form of a liquid with no odor or color. It has gained popularity at dance clubs and raves and is a popular alternative to Ecstasy for some teens and young adults. The number of people brought to emergency departments because of GHB side effects is quickly rising in the United States. And according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), since 1995 GHB has killed more users than Ecstasy.

Street Names: Liquid Ecstasy, G, Georgia Home Boy

How It's Used: When in liquid or powder form (mixed in water), GHB is drunk; in tablet form it is swallowed.

Effects & Dangers:

- GHB is a depressant drug that can cause both euphoric (high) and hallucinogenic effects.
- The drug has several dangerous side effects, including severe nausea, breathing problems, decreased heart rate, and seizures.
- GHB has been used for date rape because it is colourless and odorless and easy to slip into drinks.

- At high doses, users can lose consciousness within minutes. It's also easy to overdose: There is only a small difference between the dose used to get high and the amount that can cause an overdose.
- Overdosing GHB requires emergency care in a hospital right away. Within an hour GHB overdose can cause coma and stop someone's breathing, resulting in death.
- GHB (even at lower doses) mixed with alcohol is very dangerous — using it *even once* can kill you.

Addictiveness: When users come off GHB they may have withdrawal symptoms such as insomnia and anxiety. Teens may also become dependent upon it to feel good, deal with life, or handle stress.

Heroin

Heroin comes from the dried milk of the opium poppy, which is also used to create the class of painkillers called narcotics — medicines like codeine and morphine. Heroin can range from a white to dark brown powder to a sticky, tar-like substance.

Street Names: horse, smack, Big H, junk

How It's Used: Heroin is injected, smoked, or inhaled (if it is pure).

Effects & Dangers:

- Heroin gives you a burst of euphoric (high) feelings, especially if it's injected. This high is often followed by drowsiness, nausea, stomach cramps, and vomiting.
- Users feel the need to take more heroin as soon as possible just to feel good again.
- With long-term use, heroin ravages the body. It is associated with chronic constipation, dry skin, scarred veins, and breathing problems.
- Users who inject heroin often have collapsed veins and put themselves at risk of getting deadly infections such as HIV, hepatitis B or C, and bacterial endocarditis (inflammation of the lining of the heart) if they share needles with other users.

Addictiveness: Heroin is extremely addictive and easy to overdose on (which can cause death). Withdrawal is intense and symptoms include insomnia, vomiting, and muscle pain.

Inhalants

Inhalants are substances that are sniffed or "huffed" to give the user an immediate rush or high. They include household products like glues, paint thinners, dry cleaning fluids, gasoline, felt-tip marker fluid, correction fluid, hair spray, aerosol deodorants, and spray paint.

How It's Used: Inhalants are breathed in directly from the original container (sniffing or snorting), from a plastic bag (bagging), or by holding an inhalant-soaked rag in the mouth (huffing).

Effects & Dangers:

- Inhalants make you feel giddy and confused, as if you were drunk. Long-time users get headaches, nosebleeds, and may suffer loss of hearing and sense of smell.
- Inhalants are the most likely of abused substances to cause severe toxic reaction and death. Using inhalants, even one time, can kill you.

Addictiveness: Inhalants can be very addictive. Teens who use inhalants can become psychologically dependent upon them to feel good, deal with life, or handle stress.

Ketamine

Ketamine hydrochloride is a quick-acting anaesthetic that is legally used in both humans (as a sedative for minor surgery) and animals (as a tranquilizer). At high doses, it causes intoxication and hallucinations similar to LSD.

Street Names: K, Special K, vitamin K, bump, cat Valium

How It's Used: Ketamine usually comes in powder that users snort. Users often do it along with other drugs such as Ecstasy (called kitty flipping) or cocaine or sprinkle it on marijuana blunts.

Effects & Dangers:

- Users may become delirious, hallucinate, and lose their sense of time and reality. The trip — also called K-hole — that results from ketamine use lasts up to 2 hours.
- Users may become nauseated or vomit, become delirious, and have problems with thinking or memory.
- At higher doses, ketamine causes movement problems, body numbness, and slowed breathing.
- Overdosing on ketamine can stop you from breathing — and kill you.

Addictiveness: Teens who use it can become psychologically dependent upon it to feel good, deal with life, or handle stress.

LSD

LSD (which stands for lysergic acid diethylamide) is a lab-brewed hallucinogen and mood-changing chemical. LSD is odorless, colorless, and tasteless.

Street Names: acid, blotter, doses, microdots

How It's Used: LSD is licked or sucked off small squares of blotting paper. Capsules and liquid forms are swallowed. Paper squares containing acid may be decorated with cute cartoon characters or colorful designs.

Effects & Dangers:

- Hallucinations occur within 30 to 90 minutes of dropping acid. People say their senses are intensified and distorted — they see colours or hear sounds with other delusions such as melting walls and a loss of any sense of time. But effects are unpredictable, depending on how much LSD is taken and the user.
- Once you go on an acid trip, you can't get off until the drug is finished with you — at times up to about 12 hours or even longer!
- Bad trips may cause panic attacks, confusion, depression, and frightening delusions.
- Physical risks include sleeplessness, mangled speech, convulsions, increased heart rate, and coma.
- Users often have flashbacks in which they feel some of the effects of LSD at a later time without having used the drug again.

Addictiveness: Teens who use it can become psychologically dependent upon it to feel good, deal with life, or handle stress.

Marijuana

The most widely used illegal drug in the United States, marijuana resembles green, brown, or gray dried parsley with stems or seeds. A stronger form of marijuana called hashish (hash) looks like brown or black cakes or balls. Marijuana is often called a gateway drug because frequent use can lead to the use of stronger drugs.

Street Names: pot, weed, blunts, chronic, grass, reefer, herb, ganja

How It's Used: Marijuana is usually smoked — rolled in papers like a cigarette (joints), or in hollowed-out cigars (blunts), pipes (bowls), or water pipes (bongs). Some people mix it into foods or brew it as a tea.

Effects & Dangers:

- Marijuana can affect mood and coordination. Users may experience mood swings that range from stimulated or happy to drowsy or depressed.
- Marijuana also elevates heart rate and blood pressure. Some people get red eyes and feel very sleepy or hungry. The drug can also make some people paranoid or cause them to hallucinate.
- Marijuana is as tough on the lungs as cigarettes — steady smokers suffer coughs, wheezing, and frequent colds.

Addictiveness: Teens who use marijuana can become psychologically dependent upon it to feel good, deal with life, or handle stress. In addition, their bodies may demand more and more marijuana to achieve the same kind of high experienced in the beginning.

Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine is a powerful stimulant.

Street Names: crank, meth, speed, crystal, chalk, fire, glass, crypto, ice

How It's Used: It can be swallowed, snorted, injected, or smoked.

Effects & Dangers:

- Users feel a euphoric rush from methamphetamine, particularly if it is smoked or shot up. But they can develop tolerance quickly — and will use more meth for longer periods of time, resulting in sleeplessness, paranoia, and hallucinations.
- Users sometimes have intense delusions such as believing that there are insects crawling under their skin.
- Prolonged use may result in violent, aggressive behaviour, psychosis, and brain damage.
- The chemicals used to make methamphetamine can also be dangerous to both people and the environment.

Addictiveness: Methamphetamine is highly addictive.

Nicotine

Nicotine is a highly addictive stimulant found in tobacco. This drug is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream when smoked.

How It's Used: Nicotine is typically smoked in cigarettes or cigars. Some people put a pinch of tobacco (called chewing or smokeless tobacco) into their mouths and absorb nicotine through the lining of their mouths.

Effects & Dangers:

- Physical effects include rapid heartbeat, increased blood pressure, shortness of breath, and a greater likelihood of colds and flu.

- Nicotine users have an increased risk for lung and heart disease and stroke. Smokers also have bad breath and yellowed teeth. Chewing tobacco users may suffer from cancers of the mouth and neck.
- Withdrawal symptoms include anxiety, anger, restlessness, and insomnia.

Addictiveness: Nicotine is as addictive as heroin or cocaine, which makes it extremely difficult to quit. Those who start smoking before the age of 21 have the hardest time breaking the habit.

Rohypnol

Rohypnol (pronounced: ro-**hip**-nol) is a low-cost, increasingly popular drug. Because it often comes in presealed bubble packs, many teens think that the drug is safe.

Street Names: roofies, roach, forget-me pill, date rape drug

How It's Used: This drug is swallowed, sometimes with alcohol or other drugs.

Effects & Dangers:

- Rohypnol is a prescription anti-anxiety medication that is 10 times more powerful than Valium.
- It can cause the blood pressure to drop, as well as cause memory loss, drowsiness, dizziness, and an upset stomach.
- Though it's part of the depressant family of drugs, it causes some people to be overly excited or aggressive.
- Rohypnol has received a lot of attention because of its association with date rape. Many teen girls and women report having been raped after having rohypnol slipped into their drinks. The drug also causes "anterograde amnesia." This means it's hard to remember what happened while on the drug, like a blackout. Because of this it can be hard to give important details if a young woman wants to report the rape.

Addictiveness: Users can become physically addicted to rohypnol, so it can cause extreme withdrawal symptoms when users stop.