



# Drugs

## What Everyone Should Know



AMERICAN  
COLLEGE  
HEALTH  
ASSOCIATION

**Drugs have become an integral part of our society. Whether we're talking about legal drugs, such as alcohol and prescription medications, or illegal drugs, such as ecstasy, methamphetamine ("meth"), and cocaine, or even drugs that are both legal and illegal, such as marijuana, every one of us has to make decisions about whether or not to use drugs. Your decisions should be based on an awareness of the health and legal risks.**

### Types of Drugs

A psychoactive drug is defined as a drug, chemical, or other substance that has a specific effect on the brain. People use psychoactive drugs for a variety of reasons, ranging from relaxing in social situations to increasing their energy levels.

There are four basic categories of psychoactive drugs:

- **Stimulants** (also called uppers) increase alertness, energy, physical activity, and feelings of well-being.
- **Depressants** (also called downers) decrease body processes such as breathing, heartbeat, and brain activity.
- **Hallucinogens** can cause visual, auditory, and other sensory hallucinations.
- **Narcotics** (known as analgesics or pain relievers) work by blocking pain messages to the brain.

See the chart for examples of each type of drug. Both legal and illegal drugs are included.

### Drug Tolerance and Dependence

Use of psychoactive drugs may lead to psychological and physical dependency as well as physical tolerance. The more frequently you use a drug, the greater your likelihood of developing a **tolerance** to the drug, which will require you to take greater amounts of the drug to achieve the same effect that smaller quantities once provided.

Although dependence is associated with tolerance, it is not the same thing. People who are **physically dependent** on a drug need it to function normally and prevent withdrawal symptoms — some of which can be life threatening.

People who are **psychologically dependent** or addicted feel that they cannot function normally without the drug and are often preoccupied with thoughts of obtaining drugs or getting high. Psychological dependence can take many forms, as habitual users may feel reliant on drugs to party and socialize, to wake up or go to sleep, or to function academically, athletically, or sexually. While there may be no physical illness associated with quitting, there can be severe mental and emotional distress.

### Drugs and Your Health

Drugs may have both short-term and long-term negative effects on your health. The extent of the effects depend on a variety of factors, such as purity, quantity, the type of drug, how often it is used, how it is used (inhaling, snorting, or injecting), whether it is

mixed together with other drugs and/or alcohol, and your current physical and emotional state. Negative health effects are vast and can include:

- loss of motor coordination, which can result in injury or death through car crashes, falling, or drowning
- injury or death through violent or self-destructive behavior
- impaired memory, reduced alertness, loss of judgment, and/or other cognitive impairments
- impaired sexual response
- overdosing (poisoning from toxic levels of the drug, leading to permanent impairment or death)
- depression, anxiety, and/or psychosis
- potential for dependency
- high blood pressure
- deterioration of the heart muscle
- heart or respiratory failure
- digestive problems
- liver damage

Excessive use or overdose of certain drugs can have more immediate, severe physical consequences, such as heart attack, brain damage, coma, and even death.

Drug abuse can also lead to interpersonal conflicts, psychological issues, and financial difficulties.

### A Caution about Mixing Drugs and Sex

Drug use can impair your judgment and limit your ability to communicate effectively, leading to unhealthy sexual decision-making.

Drug use may affect your correct and consistent use of condoms and other barrier or contraceptive methods. In turn, this can increase your potential for contracting sexually transmitted infections such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV. It can also increase the risk of unplanned pregnancies.

### Consequences of Drug Use

There can be serious legal and academic consequences of using drugs, depending on the circumstances. These penalties may include:

- getting arrested
- legal fees associated with arrests and convictions
- a period of probation, community service, or a prison sentence
- expensive fines
- losing academic credit and financial aid and/or being suspended or expelled
- inability to obtain professional licenses and jobs

Driving under the influence substantially increases your chances of having or causing a car crash. If you drive under the influence of drugs you can have your driver's license suspended or revoked or have your driving privileges restricted.

In addition, drugs are frequently associated with many violent crimes, such as homicide and aggravated assault, as well as a high percentage of sex-related crimes. Depressants (including alcohol, tranquilizers, and GHB), have been used in cases of sexual assault and other crimes. These depressant drugs can be mixed in a drink (including non-alcoholic beverages) without someone's knowledge, rendering that person incapacitated and unable to prevent a crime or resist a sexual assault.

## Who Is at Risk for Drug Abuse?

Anyone can be at risk; drug abuse and dependence is an equal opportunity affliction. There is evidence, however, that suggests certain characteristics are associated with a higher likelihood of drug use/abuse: a family history of drug abuse; youth; a history of depression and other mental health conditions; and social and environmental factors.

Certain groups in the college population have been found to be at higher risk for substance abuse and/or dependency, including athletes, fraternity and sorority members, and those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT).

Using a drug despite recurrent negative consequences (academic problems, family or relationship problems, sexual assault/unplanned sex, sexually transmitted infections, or injuries) is a warning sign that serious problems with drug dependency or addiction may occur.

## How Can I Prevent Drug Abuse?

You must first realize that the decision to use drugs is a personal choice — and a choice with potentially serious health, academic, and legal consequences. It is up to you to determine when, where, and why you might use drugs and if you are willing to accept all the consequences that may result.

Ways to reduce your risk for drug abuse include:

**Know your predispositions.** Consider your personal or family history for substance abuse problems and take responsibility. If you find yourself using too much in certain situations, set limits for yourself or avoid those situations.

**Consider your reasons for using drugs.** Is it to feel good, to study, or to be more socially comfortable? What are your choices? Which ones are healthy? Which ones carry potential legal or health problems?

**If you choose to use drugs, develop your own risk reduction strategies.** Talk to a health professional on your campus or in the local community. If you don't feel comfortable talking to a health professional, contact one of the organizations listed on the back of this brochure or a campus staff person you trust. If you find yourself unable to implement the risk reduction strategies you develop, recognize that you may need to get help.

**REMEMBER:** When abused or used without a prescription, prescription drugs may become harmful and addictive. Prescription drugs such as painkillers (e.g., Vicodin) and stimulants (e.g., Adderall) should be used only as prescribed.

## How Do I Know If I Have a Problem?

The line between drug use and abuse is very fine. If you are using drugs to the point that it affects your relationships, school or work performance, athletic ability, or finances, then you may have an abuse problem. Warning signs of a drug problem are not always dramatic. They have more to do with attitude and personal relationships than with events such as passing out from using drugs or medical emergencies.

The following questions can help identify if you have a drug problem. Are you:

- Steadily using more drugs or using more drugs than you intended?
- Setting limits on how much, how often, when, or where you will use drugs and then repeatedly violating these limits?
- Experiencing memory blackouts?
- Using drugs before you go out with friends who don't or before going to activities where the drugs won't be available (class, work, etc.)?
- Using drugs alone?
- Using drugs every day?
- Having academic problems, such as missing classes, having difficulty studying, or declining grades?
- Spending more money than you can afford on drugs?
- Doing or saying things when you're under the influence that you regret later or don't remember?
- Getting in verbal or physical arguments on a frequent basis after using drugs?
- Lying to friends and family about your drug use?
- Becoming accident prone when you're under the influence (falling down, breaking things, etc.)?
- Regularly experiencing negative consequences the morning after using?
- Worrying about your drug use?
- Reducing contact with friends or experiencing increasing problems with important relationships?
- Using drugs despite the continued negative consequences?

If you answered "yes" to any of the above questions, you should consider talking with a health professional. While one "yes" doesn't mean you are dependent, it suggests that your drug use may be causing you some problems.

There are no quick cures for drug problems. However, treatment is available. Early intervention can help you avoid the harmful effects associated with long-term drug use. Seek out support from your campus health or counseling center, community groups, or from the organizations listed in this brochure.

This is a condensed chart of common drugs and their effects. For the most up-to-date and complete information, consult with a health professional.

DRUG TYPE	NAME (SLANG)	IMMEDIATE EFFECTS	COMMON COMPLICATIONS/LONG-TERM EFFECTS
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**STIMULANTS** (also called uppers) increase alertness, energy, physical activity, and feelings of well-being. Caffeine and nicotine are also considered stimulants.

Amphetamines	ADHD medications (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin) Provigil, excessive use of sports drinks and over the counter diet aids that include caffeine, gaurana, etc., MDMA (ecstasy, “molly”), methamphetamine (meth, speed, crystal, ice, crank)	Euphoria, increased alertness, excitation, decreased appetite, insomnia, restlessness, rapid heartbeat	Nervousness, paranoia, hallucinations, dizziness, tremors, malnutrition, insomnia, skin disorders, delusions, violent or psychotic moods or behaviors, decreased mental ability or permanent brain damage, sexual impotence, seizures, death
Cocaine	Cocaine powder, freebased coke (crack, blow, snow, rock)	Brief euphoria, increased energy, intense exhilaration	Tremors, nasal bleeding and inflammation, toxic psychosis, seizures, damage to nasal septum and blood vessels, death from overdose (heart or respiratory failure)

**DEPRESSANTS** (also called downers) decrease body processes such as breathing, heartbeat, and brain activity.

Alcohol	Beer, wine, liquor, some medicines	Muscle relaxation, intoxication, depression, impaired motor control, memory, and judgment	Dehydration, hangover, obesity, impotence, psychosis, ulcers, malnutrition, liver and brain damage, delirium tremens (“DTs”), death; <b>overdose or mixing with other depressants can cause respiratory failure</b>
Anti-Anxiety Drugs/Tranquilizers	Valium, clonipin, alprazolam (xanax), Rohypnol (roofies)	Relief of tension and anxiety, drowsiness	Hangover, menstrual irregularities, increases or decreases effect of other drugs, destroys blood cells, jaundice, coma, death; <b>especially dangerous when used with alcohol</b>
Barbiturates	Nembutal, Amytal, Seconal, Phenobarbital (barbs, reds, yellows)	Euphoria, relief of anxiety, loss of inhibition, muscle relaxation, loss of motor control, drowsiness	Lethargy, hangover, blurred vision, nausea, depression, seizures, excessive sleepiness, confusion, severe withdrawal sickness; <b>can be fatal if mixed with alcohol or other depressants</b>
Narcotics	Heroin (dope, smack), morphine, opium (hop), codeine, methadone, Demerol	Euphoria, drowsiness, painkiller	Respiratory and circulatory depression, dizziness, vomiting, sweating, dry mouth, lowered libido, lethargy, constipation, weight loss, temporary sterility and impotence, severe withdrawal sickness, stupor, death
Inhalants	Solvents (paint thinners, gas), amyl/butyl nitrate (poppers), gases (butane, propane, nitrous oxide, aerosal propellants), glue	Lowered blood pressure, relaxation of sphincter muscles, feeling of heightened sexual arousal	Headache, dizziness, accelerated heart rate, nausea, nasal irritation, cough, lost erection, hallucinations, damage to liver, kidney, bone marrow, and brain, death
Gamma Hydroxy Butyrate	GHB, GBL (G, GBH, Georgia Home Boyz, liquid X)	Confusion, drowsiness, memory loss, disorientation	Vomiting, delusions, hallucinations, seizures, respiratory distress, loss of consciousness, slowed heart rate, lowered blood pressure, coma; <b>especially dangerous when used with alcohol</b>

**OTHER DRUGS**

Cannabis	Marijuana (weed, pot, bud, herb, indica, sativa), hashish (hash), keef, synthetic cannabinoids (Spice, K2), MDPV (bath salts)	Relaxation, altered sense of hearing, time, and vision, euphoria, increased heart rate and appetite, dilated pupils, memory impairment	Impaired driving ability, possible lung damage, reduced sperm count and motility, damage from impure dose
Hallucinogens	LSD (acid), psilocybin (mushrooms), MDA, peyote, DMT, STP, Ketamine (K, Special K), salvia divinorum	Hallucinations, altered sense of time, space, and visual perception, nausea, disorientation, panic	Depression, high blood pressure, physical exhaustion after use, psychosis (“freaking out”), exaggerated body distortion, fears of death, paranoia, amnesia, flashbacks, adverse drug reaction, respiratory arrest

**For More Information**

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**  
www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment

**National Institute on Drug Abuse**  
www.drugabuse.gov

**SAMHSA National Helpline**  
1-800-662-HELP (4357)

**Narcotics Anonymous**  
www.na.org

**National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence**  
Hopeline: (800) NCA-CALL (622-2255)  
www.ncadd.org

**American College Health Association**  
(410) 859-1500 | www.acha.org

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