



HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF ILLICIT DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

The brief summaries are an overview of the major health risks associated with the use of illicit drugs and alcohol. Abuse of alcohol and other drugs can lead to chemical dependency and can be harmful during pregnancy.

Alcohol—*Did you know that*

- Alcohol is a depressant that decreases the responses of the central nervous system.
- Excessive drinking can cause liver damage and psychotic behavior.
- As little as two beers or drinks can impair coordination and thinking.
- Alcohol is often used by substance abusers to enhance the effects of other drugs.
- Alcohol continues to be the most frequently abused substance among young adults.

What are the Dangers of Alcohol Abuse? Risk of injury or death as a result of accident or violence, impaired vision, impaired motor coordination, memory defects, hallucinations, blackouts, and seizures. Long-term use can result in permanent damage to the brain, elevated blood pressure and heart rate, risk of stroke, heart failure, respiratory depression and failure, pneumonia, tuberculosis, lung abscesses, increased risk of mouth and throat cancer, alcoholic fatty liver, hepatitis, and cirrhosis, duodenal ulcers, reflux, diarrhea, impaired judgment and verbal ability, apathy, introversion, antisocial behavior, inability to concentrate, and deterioration of relationships with family, friends, and co-workers. Alcohol is an especially dangerous drug for pregnant women. Drinking during pregnancy raises the risk of low-birth weight babies and intrauterine growth retardation, increasing the danger of infection, feeding difficulties, and long-term developmental problems.

Marijuana—**Also known as: Pot, Grass, Joints, Roaches, Reefer, Weed, Mary Jane**—*Did you know that*

- Marijuana may cause impaired short-term memory, a shortened attention span and delayed reflexes.
- During pregnancy, marijuana may cause birth defects.
- Marijuana may cause a fast heart rate and pulse.
- Repeated use of marijuana may cause breathing problems.
- Possession of marijuana is illegal in all fifty states.
- Marijuana may cause relaxed inhibitions, disoriented behavior.
- All forms of marijuana are mind-altering. In other words, they change how the brain works.
 - Contains THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), the main active chemical in marijuana.
 - Contain more than 400 other chemicals.
 - Effects on the user depend on its strength or potency, which is related to the amount of THC it contains(5).
 - THC content of marijuana has been increasing since the 1970s.

Marijuana Risks: Impaired perception, Diminished short-term memory, loss of concentration and coordination, impaired judgment, increased risk of accidents, loss of motivation, diminished inhibitions, risk of AIDS and other STDs, increased heart rate, anxiety, panic attacks, and paranoia, hallucinations, damage to the respiratory, reproductive, and immune systems, increased risk of cancer, psychological

Cocaine— **Also known as: Coke, Dust, Snow, Flake, Blow, Girl**—*Did you know that*

- Cocaine "high" lasts only about 5 to 20 minutes.
- Cocaine use may cause severe "mood swings" and irritability.
- You need more and more cocaine each time you want a "high."
- Cocaine increases your blood pressure and heart rate - particularly dangerous if you have a heart condition.
- One use can cause death!
- Possession and use are illegal and can result in fines and arrest.

Cocaine risks: Dependence and addiction, irregular heartbeat, heart attack, and heart failure, strokes, seizures, fungal brain infections, and hemorrhaging in tissue surrounding the brain pulmonary effects, such as fluid in the lungs, aggravation of asthma and other lung disorders, and respiratory failure psychosis, paranoia, depression, anxiety disorders, and delusions, increased risk of traumatic injury from accidents and aggressive, violent, or criminal behavior, sleeplessness, sexual dysfunction, diminished sense of smell, perforated nasal septum, nausea, and headaches. Crack users often singe eyebrows or eyelashes with the flame of matches or lighters. They also burn fingertips and other body parts from contact with superheated vessels (e.g., glass pipes). Fetal cocaine effects include premature separation of the placenta, spontaneous abortion, premature labor, low birth weight and head circumference at birth, greater chance of visual impairment, mental retardation, genitourinary malformations, and greater chance of developmental problems. For intravenous (IV) cocaine users, there is increased risk of hepatitis, HIV infection, and endocarditis. For addicts, whether they smoke, inject, or snort, promiscuous sexual activity can increase the risk of HIV infection.

Crack, "Crack cocaine", Freebase rocks, Rock - *Did you know that*

- Crack is almost instantly addictive.
- One use could cause a fatal heart attack.
- Repeated use may cause insomnia, hallucinations, seizures, paranoia.
- The euphoric effects of crack last only a few minutes.
- Crack possession and use are illegal in all fifty states.

There are more hospitalizations per year resulting from crack and cocaine use than any other illicit substance.

Barbiturates

Health Risks: In small doses, barbiturates produce calmness, relaxed muscles and lowered anxiety. Larger doses cause slurred speech, staggering gait and altered perception. Very large doses taken in combination with other central nervous system depressants (e.g., alcohol) cause respiratory depression, coma and sometimes death.

Symptoms: A person who uses barbiturates may have poor muscle control, appear drowsy or drunk, become confused, irritable, inattentive or have slowed reactions.

Ice Also known as: Meth, Crystal, Crank, Methamphetamine—Did you know that

- Ice is extremely addictive - sometimes with just one use!
- Ice can cause convulsions, heart irregularities, high blood pressure, depression, restlessness, tremors, severe fatigue.
- An overdose can cause coma and death
- When you stop using ice you may experience a deep depression.
- Ice causes a very jittery high, along with anxiety, insomnia, sometimes paranoia.

Dangers and consequences of meth use: sleeplessness, loss of appetite and weight loss, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, elevated body temperature, skin ulceration and infection, the result of picking at imaginary bugs, paranoia, depression, irritability, anxiety, increased blood pressure, due to the constriction of blood vessels, that may produce headaches, chest pain,

or irregular heartbeat and lead to stroke or heart attack, seizures, permanent damage to brain cells caused by injury to small blood vessels serving the brain. For pregnant women—premature labor, detachment of the placenta, and low birth weight babies with possible neurological damage, poor feeding, and lethargy. For intravenous (IV) users—AIDS, hepatitis, infections and sores at the injection site, and infection of the heart lining and valves (endocarditis).

Hallucinogens (Types Including: PCP, LSD, Mescaline, Peyote, Psilocybin)—Did you know that

- One use of LSD or PCP can cause multiple and dramatic behavioral changes.
- Large doses of hallucinogens may cause convulsions, ruptured blood vessels in the brain and irreversible brain damage.
- Many hallucinogens cause unpleasant and potentially dangerous "flashbacks," long after the drug was used.
- Most hallucinogens cause "hallucinations," i.e., changes in perception of time, smell, touch, etc.

How does LSD Affect You? Dilated pupils, high temperature, rapid heartbeat, increased blood pressure, sleeplessness, appetite loss, and tremors. Acute anxiety, depression, panic, paranoia, or psychotic behavior may accompany a bad trip or may occur after most other effects of the drug have worn off. An overdose can result in a longer, more intense and more frightening trip, and the spontaneous, recurring hallucinations known as flashbacks can occur days, weeks, or more than a year after LSD use.

Ecstasy Called MDMA (3-4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine) by scientists, it is a synthetic chemical that can be derived from an essential oil of the sassafras tree. One of the most dangerous drugs threatening young people today. MDMA is also one of the easiest illegal drugs to obtain.

- Effects similar to those of amphetamines and hallucinogens.
- Distributed almost anywhere, it has become very popular at social events like raves, hip hop parties, concerts, etc. frequented by both adults and youth. While not all "event" attendees use Ecstasy, the drug often makes the circuit of these parties and can set up dangerous circumstances that can affect everyone there.
- Short-term effects include psychological difficulties (confusion, depression, sleep problems, craving, severe anxiety, and paranoia). These effects occur during use and can continue even weeks after use.
- Physical problems that can occur are muscle tension, involuntary teeth clenching, nausea, blurred vision, rapid eye movement, fever, chills or sweating.

Long Term Effects Recent findings connect use of Ecstasy to memory loss. Use of Ecstasy depletes serotonin, a very important chemical in the brain which regulates mood, sleeping and eating habits, as well as, the thinking and behavior process, sexual function, and sensitivity to pain.

Narcotics (including Heroin, Codeine, Morphine, Opium, Precedent)

Paying the Price of Heroin Use: range from mild distress to life threatening dangers and include: dry, itchy skin and skin infections, constricted pupils and reduced night vision, nausea and vomiting (following early use or high doses), constipation and loss of appetite, menstrual irregularity, reduced sex drive, scarring ("tracks") along veins and collapsed veins from repeated injections, irregular blood pressure, slow and irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia), fatigue, breathlessness, and labored, noisy breathing due to excessive fluid in the lungs ("the rattles"), injuries that result from engaging in any activity (such as working, driving, or operating machinery) when incapacitated by heroin use, dependence, addiction, hepatitis, AIDS, and other infections from unsanitary injection, stroke or heart attack caused by blood clots resulting from insoluble additives, respiratory paralysis, heart arrest, coma, and death from accidental overdose

For Self Help Referrals visit US Department of Health and Human Resources and SAMHSA's National Clearing House for Alcohol and Drug Information at <http://ncadistore.samhsa.gov/catalog/referrals.aspx?topic=83&h=resources>

Resources

US Department of Health and Human Resources and SAMHSA's National Clearing House for Alcohol and Drug Information <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/govpubs/rpo926/#Depr>

American Council for Drug Education, an Affiliate of Phoenix House <http://www.acde.org/health/Research.htm>

As required with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (Public Law 101-226) Cabarrus College provides this description of the health risks associated with the use of illicit drugs and alcohol.