



Drugs

Your choice, your life

What is a drug?

A drug is any chemical which alters how the body works, or how a person behaves or feels.

A drug's effect depends on:

- It's type and strength
- The amount taken
- The user's mood and personality
- Other factors like body weight, age, gender etc...

Apart from the much publicised dangers associated with illegal drugs like heroin, cocaine and cannabis, it is important to understand the significant dangers of misusing legal ones like alcohol and tobacco.

Why are drugs used?

- Medically to treat illness and disease
- To relieve pain, anxiety and stress
- Socially to relax and enhance pleasure

Use or misuse – The distinction

Misuse occurs when the use of a drug (legal or illegal) is harmful, or potentially harmful to the physical, mental or social well being of an individual, group, or society.

Why do young people use drugs?

Numerous reasons are given, including:

- Curiosity
- Influence of friends
- To feel grown-up
- To establish independence
- As an expression of rebellion
- For pleasure
- To escape from reality
- To help cope with insecurity, loneliness, or depression

Who misuses drugs?

Misuse occurs in all social classes and age groups. For young people there is the added risk of it disrupting normal development.

What are the risks and dangers of drug abuse?

1. Accidents or injury

Even small amounts of some drugs, including alcohol, can impair co-ordination and clear thinking, making the user more prone to accident or injury. Some drugs depress or arrest breathing, which may lead to unconsciousness or death.

2. Effects on the brain

Even a small amount of some drugs can cause mental and emotional disturbance. Regular use may impair psychological development and school performance.

3. Relationships

Relationships with family and friends suffer because of drugs.

4. Dependence/Addiction

This is the state where a person feels compelled to take a drug and is unable to cope without it.

Some drugs cause a physical dependence requiring a "weaning-off period".

(Withdrawal symptoms may occur if the drug is unavailable).

Regular drug taking can result in the need for ever larger doses to achieve the same effect.

5. Contamination

If a contaminated drug is used, there may be severe or unpredictable reactions.

6. Infections

Unclean needles can cause blood poisoning, abscesses, and infections like Hepatitis B and HIV (The virus which causes AIDS).

7. Financial considerations

Drug misuse can be very costly and this in turn may lead to financial problems, debts and crime.

8. Illegality

Illegal drugs carry the risk of involvement with the law, possibly resulting in a criminal record.

How do you spot drug taking?

Because the symptoms are similar, a drug taker can be mistaken for someone who is merely "off form". However, the following list provides a useful guide:

- Abnormally sleepy or drowsy
- Sudden mood changes
- Lack of concentration, memory loss, black-outs, hallucinations
- Lack of interest in work, old friends and hobbies
- Keeping unusually late hours
- Secrecy about activities and whereabouts
- Telling lies and/or stealing

- New and strange friends
- Unusual smells, stains or marks on body and/or clothes
- Unusual powders, capsules, tablets, syringes, needles, or scorched tin-foil

It is important to consider all possibilities, before concluding that someone is taking drugs.

What to do if you know someone is abusing drugs

Firstly, get advice from a parent, trusted adult, or counsellor. Any drug user should be referred to a doctor, school counsellor, community addiction counsellor or the Drug Treatment Centre, Trinity Court, Pearse Street, Dublin 2, Tel: 6771122.

In an emergency

If someone overdoses and is drowsy or unconscious:

- Never leave them alone, but comfort and reassure them
- If unconscious, turn them on their side to prevent them inhaling vomit.
- Ring for a doctor or ambulance
- Give any substance or implement they used in drug taking to the doctor

Preventing substance abuse is your choice

- Be sure you know the facts and risks
- It's your life, so have the courage to say "no" to drugs
- Get into hobbies like sport and music. It's easy to enjoy life without drugs
- Share your problems with friends – don't bottle them up
- If you are misusing drugs, don't delay! Get help now!

Common drugs

	STIMULANTS	SEDATIVES	HALLUCINOGEN S	OPIATES
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Effects of use	Produce an increase in physical and mental activity. They range from mild stimulants such as nicotine and caffeine to strong stimulants such as cocaine and amphetamines. Weight reducing drugs are also part of this group.	Reduce feelings of anxiety and tension e.g. alcohol, sleeping tablets, tranquillisers, anti-depressants. A person on prescribed medication should consult their doctor before altering their dose.	May distort reality and cause hallucinations, e.g. L.S.D., inhalants/solvents, magic mushrooms. N.B. Even one experiment with solvents may be fatal.	Pain relieving drugs derived from the opium poppy. They include heroin, opium, morphine, codeine, as well as the synthetic opiates. Of value in the medical treatment of severe pain.
Effects of abuse	Physical and mental hyperactivity. Feelings of confidence and superiority. Effects depend on user's mood and amount taken.	Slurred speech, staggering, lack of co-ordination	Hallucinations, paranoia, confusion of time and distance, disturbance of reality.	Drowsiness, slowing down of mental and physical activity, detachment from reality.
Risks	Anxiety, panic attacks, depression, fatigue, dependence and overdose	Overdose with risk of death, particularly if combined with alcohol. Dependence may occur with regular use	Personality change, psychosis, memory loss, accidental injury, death.	Physical and psychological dependence. Physical debilitation due to neglect of health. Infection from using and sharing unclean needles, e.g. Hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS. Risk of overdose and death.
CANNABIS		ECSTASY		

<p>(Which has sedative and hallucinogenic properties) Cannabis, derived from the cannabis sativa plant, has both sedative and hallucinogenic properties. Its effect depends on the strength of the drug, as well as the mood and personality of the user and the frequency of use. It comes in three forms: Marijuana ("grass") – the leaves and fruiting tops of the plant; Hashish ("hash") – resin extracted from the plant; Hashish oil – a further concentrated extract. The active ingredient in cannabis is THC (tetrahydrocannabinol). THC remains in the fatty tissue of the brain and reproductive organs for up to several weeks.</p> <p>Effects of abuse Intoxication, impaired judgement and concentration, risks of accidents, fatigue, mood swings, loss of interest in school or work, impairment of memory and learning ability.</p> <p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased risk of mental disturbance • Increased risk of cancer • Adverse effect on male and female reproductive systems. • Maternal cannabis use during pregnancy may affect the foetus. • Psychological dependence. 	<p>Ecstasy is an illegally produced drug which has properties of both amphetamines and hallucinogens. It is used in expectation of its pleasurable effects and is often associated with "Rave" parties. An ecstasy tablet costs approximately £15.</p> <p>Risks of use The effects of ecstasy are unpredictable and may result in both psychological and physical problems.</p> <p>Psychological problems Include anxiety, panic attacks, mental confusion, psychosis and depression.</p> <p>Physical problems Include clotting, muscle breakdown, weight loss, kidney failure, liver damage and cardiac abnormalities. Ecstasy may cause brain damage and even death. Dependence may occur with regular use.</p>
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Further help is available from:

Family Doctor, Pharmacist, Community Addiction Counsellor, Health Board, Garda Síochána, Clergy, Teachers, Social Workers or Probation Officers.

Drug Treatment Centre Board
30-31 Pearse Street
Dublin 2
Tel: 01-677 1122

Health Promotion Unit
Department of Health
Hawkins House
Dublin 2
Tel: 01-671 4711

Cross Care
Catholic Social Service Conference,
Drug Awareness Programme,
The Red House,

Clonliffe College,
Dublin 3
Tel: 01-836 0011

The Talbot Centre
29 Upper Buckingham Street
Dublin 1
Tel: 01-836 3434

Narcotics Anonymous,
Friends Meeting House,
Eustace Street,
Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-830 0944 Ext: 486

Coolmine Therapeutic Community
19 Lord Edward Street,
Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-679 3765/679 4822

The Drug Squad,
Harcourt Square,
Harcourt Street,
Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-475 1356/873 2222

Mater Dei
Counselling Centre,
Clonliffe Road,
Dublin 3.
Tel: 01-837 1892

Community Awareness of Drugs (CAD),
30/31A Central Hotel Chambers,
Dame Court,
Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-679 2681