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Q's and A's on Drug Testing

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Q How long do different drugs stay in the body's system?

A The length of time the drug or its metabolites can be detected in the urine is called the "retention time." Retention times differ according to these factors:

- ❖ Amount of drug consumed
- ❖ Method of drug use
- ❖ Whether use is chronic or occasional
- ❖ Individual rates of metabolism and excretion
- ❖ Diet
- ❖ Acidity of the urine
- ❖ Fluid intake
- ❖ Time of day.

Because of all these variables, the values represented in this table should be used as general guidelines only.

Q How accurate is drug testing?

A There are a variety of methods available to test for illegal substances. These methods are accurate and reliable if these two areas of drug testing are adhered to:

1. *Use of confirmation assay.* If a positive result occurs, the specimen is then tested again by a different chemical method to confirm the positive.
2. *Quality control procedures.* A good laboratory will document how and by whom the sample is handled from the time it is take from the individual, through the laboratory, until the final assay result is tabulated. This record is referred to as the "chain of custody" for the sample.

Q Are there any legal substances which can crate a "false positive" for illegal drug usage?

A Listed in this article are some of the more often used substances which can affect drug testing:

Over-The-Counter Medications.

Some medications contain high concentrations of decongestants that will produce a positive result for amphet-

amines. Appropriate confirmatory testing will detect when the drug is a decongestant or an amphetamine.

Poppy Seeds.

Poppy seeds frequently found on bagels or other baked products do contain sufficient amounts of morphine to produce a detectable test result. This can be resolved by using a test which will detect a substance in the urine which is only found in the illegal substance heroin.

Secondhand Marijuana Smoke.

Passive inhalation of marijuana smoke is frequently claimed as a reason for a positive urine test. Yes, passive inhalation of marijuana smoke can be detected but studies show it is highly unlikely that a nonsmoking individual could unknowingly inhale sufficient smoke by passive inhalation to result in a high enough drug concentration in urine for detection at the cutoff of currently used urinalysis methods.

A Drug's Length of Stay in the Body's System

Amphetamines 1-2 days
(crystal, Ice, crank, methamphetamines)

Barbiturates

Short-acting (e.g. secobarbital), 1-3 days
 Long-acting (e.g. phenobarbital), 1-3 weeks

Benzodiazepines 1-14 days

(librium, tranxene, valium, serax)

Cannabinoids (marijuana)

Occasional use, 1-7 days
 Chronic use, 1-4 weeks

Cocaine 12-48 hours

Methadone 1-3 days

Methaqualone 1-3 days
(quaalude)

Opiates 1-3 days

(heroin, morphine, codeine)

Phencyclidine (PCP)

Occasional use, 1-8 days
 Chronic use, up to 30 days

Propoxyphene 1-3 days
(darvon)