

DRUG ABUSE AND TEENAGERS

A **drug** is defined as any chemical that produces a therapeutic or nontherapeutic effect on the body. Illegal drugs include dangerous chemicals that have only toxic actions.

Experimentation with drugs is common among teenagers. Unfortunately, most teenagers tend to feel indestructible; they do not see a link between their actions today and the consequences tomorrow.

Beginning alcohol and tobacco use at a young age increases the risk of using other drugs later. Some will experiment and stop, but for others, dependency develops, leading them to move to increasingly dangerous drugs and resulting in significant harm to themselves and possibly to others.

Who Is At Risk?

Teens experiment with drugs for many reasons, including

- Curiosity
- Because it feels good
- To reduce stress
- To feel grown up or to fit in

Teens who are most at risk are those

- With a family history of substance abuse
- Who are depressed
- Who have low self-esteem
- Who feel like they don't fit in or are out of the mainstream

Drugs Abused by Teens

ALCOHOL

Alcohol use continues to increase among teenagers, even those as young as 8th grade.

TOBACCO

Smoking among teens is associated with many other risky behaviors. Teens who smoke are more likely to use alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine, as well as engaging in activities such as fighting and having unprotected sex.

INHALANTS

Getting high by inhaling the fumes of common household products results in the deaths of more than a thousand children each year. Many others develop serious respiratory disorders and permanent brain damage.

MARIJUANA

After a brief decline in the 1980s, marijuana use among teens appears to be steadily increasing.

STIMULANTS

Crack, the smokeable form of cocaine, and other stimulants lead to long-term effects including tolerance and dependence, violence and aggression, and malnutrition caused by lack of appetite.

CLUB DRUGS

These are drugs being used by teens and young adults at all-night dance parties called “raves” or “trances,” dance clubs, and bars. These include MDMA (ecstasy), GHB, Rohypnol (Rohies), ketamine, methamphetamine, and LSD. Some of these are colorless, tasteless, and odorless, so they can be added unnoticed to a beverage. In recent years, these drugs have been increasingly used in this manner to commit sexual assaults.

DEPRESSANTS

These are drugs used in medicine to treat irritability or anxiety. When combined with alcohol, the effects are heightened, as are the risks.

HEROIN

Heroin use is on the rise, particularly with the development of inexpensive, high-purity heroin that can be sniffed or smoked rather than injected.

STEROIDS

These drugs have been increasing in abuse as well, particularly among athletes who believe they will enhance their athletic performance.