

tool kit for teen care

Common Drugs of Abuse



What are the most common drugs of abuse among teens?

Tobacco

- Nicotine is the strongest active chemical in tobacco.
- In 1998, the number of teens who smoke decreased for the first time in more than 10 years.
- A total of 63% of teens have tried cigarettes by the 12th grade.
- See "Tobacco Use and Adolescent Girls" fact sheet.

Alcohol

- Alcohol is the most commonly used and abused drug that affects mood and thinking.
- A total of 51.7% of eighth graders and 80.3% of 12th graders have used alcohol.
- When asked, 32.3% of 12th graders had been drunk recently, and 11.3% drink daily.
- Binge drinking is having five or more drinks in a row usually at least once every month. When asked, 30% of all 12th graders had drunk five or more drinks in a row during the previous 2 weeks.

What happens?

- Using alcohol makes it harder to make good decisions, makes the teen clumsier, and increases the chance of unprotected sexual intercourse and acquaintance rape.
- Long-term use of alcohol is linked to poor nutrition and damage to the liver and brain.
- Use of alcohol during pregnancy can lead to a baby being born with mental retardation.
- In 1996, 2,315 youths aged 15–20 years died in alcohol related motor vehicle accidents.

Marijuana

- Marijuana use has been increasing since 1991. In 2000, 20.3% of 8th graders and 48.9% of 12th graders had used marijuana.

What happens?

- Using marijuana causes problems in knowing what is real, difficulty thinking, poor memory, loss of coordination, and anxiety.
- Long-term use leads to lung disease, and difficulty becoming pregnant when it is wanted.

Uppers and Downers

- The stimulant seen most frequently in the media is methamphetamine, an easily manufactured chemical with different uses.
- Many stimulants, and another class of drugs, barbiturates, or downers, may be used alone or together.
- A total of 15.6% of 12th graders have used stimulants, with 7.9% using crystal methamphetamine.
- A total of 9.2% of 12th graders have used barbiturates and 8.9% tranquilizers.
- A total of 60.8% of 12th graders have observed use of stimulants during their lifetime.

What happens?

- Methamphetamine use changes the body functions, which results in "binge and crash" cycles. This means that doses are continuously increased to get the desired effect with the abuser ultimately "crashing."
- Use of methamphetamines causes perceived happiness, increased alertness, and hypersexuality.
- Occasional use causes anxiety and paranoia. Continued use causes severe paranoia, violent behavior, hallucinations of something touching or hurting the skin (shown by chronic itching with skin ulcers), and memory loss.

Hallucinogens

- Includes drugs such as PCP (phencyclidine or "angel dust") and LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide).
- The majority of people that use these drugs are adolescents.
- When asked, 11.1% of 12th graders said they have tried LSD, and 3.4% have tried PCP.



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What happens?

- Effects vary depending on the drug, but usually include body image and shape changes, and cause the user to lose touch with reality. Higher doses can cause violent behavior.
- Effects can last for many hours after the drug is out of the system, and can come and go in waves.

Inhalants

- Includes glue, aerosol, butane, or solvents. Inhaling the substance directly causes the effects.
- They are used mostly by younger teens. Those who continually abuse inhalants usually go on to other drugs of abuse.
- In 1996, use of inhalants began to decrease.
- Use of these drugs tends to be limited to adolescents.
- A total of 17.9% of 8th graders had used inhalants in 2000, while 14.2% of 12th graders had a previous history of use.

What happens?

- Effects are euphoria, light-headedness, sleepiness, and sometimes hallucinations.
- Use may result in an abnormal heart rhythm, which can lead to sudden death.
- Bone marrow toxicity, liver damage, renal failure, and neurologic effects can occur.

Opioids

- Morphine, heroin (diacetylmorphine), codeine, and many other forms of opioids are available.
- A total of 2.4% of 12th graders have used heroin.
- OxyContin is a long acting narcotic that has been used as a pain reliever since 1995. It is one of many prescription medicines that are used as an illicit street drug.

What happens?

- These agents produce feelings of euphoria, sleepiness, and decreased sensitivity to pain.
- Effects can include overdose, constipation, and kidney problems.

Cocaine and Crack Cocaine

- These drugs are normally consumed by snorting, inhaling, or smoking. The drug works on nerve endings where it squeezes blood vessels.
- A total of 8.6% of 12th graders have used cocaine, and 3.9% have used crack cocaine.

What happens?

- Bad reactions include high blood pressure, seizures, abnormal heart rhythm, strokes, and malnutrition.

Club Drugs

- Ecstasy (MDMA), gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB, "liquid X," "g-juice"), Rohypnol ("roofies," forget pill), ketamine ("Special K," "Vitamin K," "Kit Kat") are some of the club and rave drugs. Street names like ecstasy give the false impression that the drug will have a positive impact on the teen's life.
- A total of 11% of 12th graders have used ecstasy. This drug shows the largest increase of use among commonly abused drugs in both 1999 and 2000.
- Rohypnol, ketamine, and GHB are called "date rape" drugs because they can cause unconsciousness and amnesia (loss of memory) of recent events. A total of 1.9% of 12th graders have used these drugs.

What happens?

- Permanent damage to nerves that control mood. Permanent damage to memory and being able to think clearly.
- Hallucinations and mental stimulation also may occur.

For more information on substance abuse, see the "Alcohol and Other Drug Use" fact sheet.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

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American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

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Fax: (202) 484-3917
www.acog.org

Drug Strategies

1150 Connecticut Avenue
Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036
Telephone: (202) 289-9070
www.drugstrategies.org

Join Together

441 Stuart Street, 7th Floor
Boston, MA 02116
Telephone: (617) 437-1500
www.jointogether.org

Monitoring the Future

www.MonitoringTheFuture.org

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information

PO Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20847-2345
Telephone: 800-729-6686
www.health.org

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

6000 Executive Boulevard, Willco Building
Bethesda, MD 20892-7003
Telephone: (301) 443-3885
www.niaaa.nih.gov

National Institute on Drug Abuse

6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 5213
Bethesda, MD 20892-9561
Telephone: (301) 443-1124
www.nida.nih.gov

Partnership for a Drug Free America

405 Lexington Avenue, Suite 1601
New York, NY 10174
www.drugfreeamerica.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

5600 Fishers Lane
Parklawn Building, Room 12-105
Rockville, MD 20857
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