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Common Drugs of Abuse

Marijuana

Marijuana enhances the senses and brings on feelings of relaxation and well-being. Marijuana is also used medicinally to relieve pain, reduce nausea and vomiting, and stimulate appetite.

However, there are drawbacks to extended use, including learning and memory impairment, lung and respiratory problems caused by the smoke, and infertility. Marijuana abuse has also been linked to low achievement, delinquent behavior, and poor family relationships.

Types and street names:

- Marijuana (pot, dope, weed)
- Hashish

Signs and Effects of Marijuana Abuse

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ▪ Sense of relaxation | ▪ Impaired coordination |
| ▪ Heightened sensory awareness | ▪ Respiratory problems |
| ▪ Increase in appetite | ▪ Red, dilated eyes |
| ▪ Slowed thinking and reaction time | ▪ Memory and learning difficulties |
| ▪ Anxiety and paranoia | ▪ Increased heart rate |

Depressants and downers

Depressants, commonly known as downers, are substances that slow down the central nervous system. Sleeping pills and prescription medications for anxiety such as Xanax and Valium fall into this drug category, as do Rohypnol and GHB, known as “date rape” drugs due to their frequent use in sexual assaults. Individuals suffering from anxiety and low self-esteem often abuse downers. But while downers induce relaxation, they also impair the user's ability to think clearly and react quickly.

People abusing depressants may appear to be drunk—exhibiting signs such as losing their balance and slurring their words. Additionally, they may suffer from amnesia and delusions. Downers are highly addictive, and withdrawal is severe, with symptoms including nausea, vomiting, and cramps. Downers are lethal in high doses, particularly when mixed with alcohol.

Types and street names

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|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| ▪ Barbiturates (downers, sedatives) | ▪ Rohypnol (roofies) |
| ▪ Benzodiazepines (downers, tranqs) | ▪ GHB (liquid ecstasy) |
| ▪ Methaqualone (Qualudes) | |

Signs and Effects of Downer Abuse

- Decreased anxiety
- Sense of relaxation and well-being
- Lowered inhibitions
- Drowsiness and fatigue
- Slowed breathing and pulse
- Depression
- Confusion and disorientation
- Slurred speech
- Impaired coordination
- Impaired memory and judgment

Stimulants and uppers

Stimulants, or uppers, are drugs that speed up the central nervous system. Commonly abused uppers include cocaine, methamphetamine, crack, and prescription ADHD medications such as Ritalin and Adderall.

While stimulants initially boost energy and confidence, their use over time leads to symptoms of anxiety, aggression, sleep difficulties, hallucinations, and paranoid thinking. As uppers wear off, users experience a “crash,” characterized by depression, fatigue, and irritability.

Types and street names

- Amphetamines (uppers, speed)
- Cocaine (coke, blow)
- Crack cocaine
- Methamphetamine (meth, crank)
- Crystal meth
- Ritalin and other ADHD drugs

Signs and Effects of Upper Abuse

- Feelings of exhilaration and euphoria
- Increased energy and hyperactivity
- Rapid or irregular heart beat
- Reduced appetite and weight loss
- Aggressive or impulsive behavior
- Anxiety and restlessness
- Insomnia
- Irritability
- Paranoia
- Rapid speech

Hallucinogens and dissociative drugs

Hallucinogens and dissociative drugs, also known as psychedelics, are mind-altering drugs that affect the user's sensory perceptions and thought processes. Hallucinogens such as LSD and peyote can promote insight, contemplation, and euphoria—with some users reporting spiritual or out-of-body experiences. But on the flip side, these same drugs can result in “bad trips” characterized by panic and psychotic breaks with reality.

Ecstasy, a popular club drug with both hallucinogenic and stimulant properties, boosts empathy and feelings of interpersonal closeness. Risks include a dangerous increase in body temperature, liver damage, and heart problems. The dissociative drugs PCP and ketamine block perception of pain and induce a trance-like state. Adverse effects can be severe and include violent reactions, complete disorientation, and terrifying delusions and hallucinations.

Types and Street Names

- PCP (angel dust)
- LSD (acid)
- Mescaline (peyote)
- Psilocybin (magic mushrooms)
- MDMA (ecstasy)
- Ketamine (Special K)

Signs and Effects of Hallucinogen Abuse

- Heightened sensory awareness
- Hallucinations
- Euphoria
- Impaired perception of reality
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Nausea and vomiting
- Flashbacks
- Panic or paranoia
- Impaired motor function
- Memory loss

Narcotics and opioids

Narcotics, or opioids, are powerful pain relievers that mimic the effects of endorphins, the body's natural "feel-good" chemical. Commonly abused narcotics include heroin, morphine, codeine, and prescription painkillers such as Vicodin and Oxycontin. These drugs elevate mood and induce a tranquil, relaxed state. Side effects include nausea, vomiting, and severe itching.

Tolerance and physical dependency will develop if opioids are used for any extended period of time. If a narcotics abuser quits "cold turkey," he or she will experience withdrawal symptoms. While not dangerous, withdrawal from heroin and other narcotics is extremely unpleasant, with symptoms including muscle and joint pain, fever, nausea, sweats, chills, stomach cramps, and diarrhea.

Overdose is another risk of narcotic abuse, especially if the user is shooting the drug. Another danger of intravenous opioid or heroin use is infection from dirty needles. Intravenous drug users are at a higher risk of contracting viruses such as HIV and hepatitis, and often suffer from abscesses, collapsed veins, and bacterial infections.

Types and street/brand names

- Heroin (smack, junk)
- Opium
- Morphine
- Codeine
- Hydroquinone (Vicodin)
- Fentanyl (Duragesic)
- Oxycodone (Oxycontin, Percocet)
- Hydromorphone (Dilaudid)
- Meperidine (Demerol)
- Propoxyphene (Darvon)

Signs and Effects of Narcotic Abuse

- Pain relief
- Euphoria
- Drowsiness and sedation
- Nausea
- Constipation
- Confusion
- Slowed breathing
- Depression

Inhalants

Inhalants are chemicals that cause intoxication when sniffed or inhaled. They include common, household solvents, aerosols, and gases such as paint thinner, dry-cleaning fluid, gasoline, glue, felt-tip marker fluid, deodorant and hair sprays, spray paint, air fresheners, butane lighters, and propane tanks.

Other abused inhalants include medical anesthetics such as “laughing gas,” ether, and chloroform. While “huffing” gives users a brief high, this high often comes with side effects including nausea, vomiting, delusions, confusion, and loss of consciousness. Prolonged inhalant abuse can also cause damage to the brain and other organs of the body.

But the biggest risk involved with inhalant use is death by overdose. Inhalant use can cause sudden heart failure, or “sudden sniffing death syndrome,” even in individuals who are young and healthy.

Types and street names

- Solvents (paint thinners, gasoline, glues)
- Aerosols (hair spray, spray paint)
- Gases (butane, propane)
- Nitrous oxide (laughing gas)
- Nitrites (poppers)

Signs and Effects of Inhalants

- Brief “high”
- Loss of inhibition
- Headache or lightheadedness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Seizures
- Impaired motor coordination
- Impaired memory
- Weakness and fatigue

Anabolic steroids

Unlike other drugs of abuse, anabolic steroids don't have any intoxicating effects. They are used, not to get “high,” but to improve athletic performance and build muscle. But while steroids may help would-be athletes bulk up or obtain an edge on the field, they come with serious side effects and health risks.

Steroid abuse causes blood pressure to skyrocket, increases bad cholesterol (LDL) while decreasing good cholesterol (HDL), triggers violent and aggressive behavior, results in severe acne, and brings growth to a halt in adolescents.

Women taking steroids can develop facial hair, a deep voice, and male-pattern baldness. Men, on the other hand, can develop breasts, infertility, shrinking of the testicles, and baldness.

Types and street names

- Anabolic steroids (roids, juice)

Signs and Effects of Anabolic Steroids

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|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ▪ Stunted growth in adolescents | ▪ High blood pressure |
| ▪ Breast enlargement in men | ▪ Infertility |
| ▪ Facial hair growth in women | ▪ Liver disease |
| ▪ Hostility and aggression | ▪ Cardiovascular disease |
| ▪ Acne | ▪ Cholesterol changes |

Prescription drug abuse

Prescription drug abuse is just as dangerous as street drug use. When used appropriately, prescription drugs can have beneficial effects medically or psychologically. Prescription drugs in the opiate family, such as Vicodin (hydrocodone) and Oxycontin, are often prescribed for chronic pain or recovery from surgery. Benzodiazapines, such as Valium or Xanax, are prescribed to treat anxiety. The problem arises when these drugs begin to be used 'off label'. Furthermore, prescription drugs provide an easy access point to other family members susceptible to abuse.

Drug withdrawal symptoms

Most drugs of abuse are not only psychologically addictive but physically addictive as well. As the body grows accustomed to the drug, more and more of it is needed to achieve the same effect. Trying to cut down or stop can result in be unpleasant and even dangerous withdrawal symptoms.

Withdrawal symptoms

Cocaine

Agitation, insomnia, anxiety, depression, anger, cravings, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, shakes, irritability, muscle pain.

Methamphetamine

Extreme fatigue, disturbed sleeping patterns, irritability, restlessness, intense hunger, moderate to severe depression, anxiety, angry outbursts, lack of motivation, mental confusion, psychotic reactions, depression, intense cravings for the drug.

Opiates

Watery eyes, runny nose, yawning, sweating, chills, stomach cramps, shakes, feeling jittery, irritability, panic, tremors, anxiety, restlessness, insomnia, dilated pupils, goose bumps, rapid heart beat, high blood pressure, nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, muscle aches and pains.

Benzodiazepines

Sleeplessness, irritability, anxiety, feeling shaky, headache, dizziness, loss of appetite, rapid heartbeat, sweating, agitation, and in extreme cases seizures.