



# UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

# GET THE FACTS ABOUT DRUGS

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**LET'S DEVELOP**  
OUR LIVES  
OUR COMMUNITIES  
OUR IDENTITIES  
**WITHOUT DRUGS**



Photos: Ioulia Kondratovitch

# Introduction

What are drugs? Technically speaking, they are chemical substances that affect the normal functioning of the body and/or brain. Not all drugs are illegal. For example, caffeine (found in coffee or Coca-Cola), nicotine (in cigarettes) and alcohol are all technically legal drugs, although they are usually not referred to as such. Medicines, whether prescribed by a doctor or available over the counter at pharmacies, are legal drugs to help us recover from illnesses, although they can also be abused.

Illegal drugs are drugs that are so harmful that countries across the world have decided to control them. Countries have passed several international laws, in the form of United Nations conventions, that specify which drugs are controlled.

All the drugs discussed in this brochure are illegal. This means that generally, it is against the law to own, use or sell these drugs worldwide.

Drugs tend to have several street names and this brochure will tell you some of them. However, it is not a complete list and the drugs might have different names in your country or city. These names may also change over time. The street names do not tell you anything about the strength or purity of a drug.

All illegal drugs have immediate physical effects, which you can read about in this brochure. But drugs can also severely hinder psychological and emotional development, particularly

among young people. In fact, drugs can take away potential that users can never get back as drugs substitute the development of other, natural coping mechanisms.

Although each drug is discussed separately in this brochure, drugs are often used together. This mixing can have unpredictable, severe effects on the body and/or mind of the user.

Drugs cloud the judgement of users. This means that drug users often take more risks, such as having unsafe sex. This can lead to them getting infected with hepatitis or HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

There are lots of reasons why people take illegal drugs. Some take them to escape problems while others are bored, curious or just want to feel good. People may be pressured into taking drugs to "fit in" with a particular crowd or to rebel or get attention.

Drug users come from all kinds of backgrounds. They are male and female, young and old, rich and poor, working and unemployed, from the city and the countryside—it does not matter. Drug use can affect anyone.

While some of the physical effects of drugs might sound nice, they do not last long. Many people get depressed and lonely afterwards and start feeling sick. Also, it is common for people who use drugs to seem confused, have red eyes, sweat a lot and not care about their physical appearance. And, of course, there is the risk of becoming addicted.



### **What is it?**

Cannabis is a tobacco-like greenish or brownish material made of the dried flowering tops and leaves of the cannabis (hemp) plant.

Cannabis resin or "hash" is the dried black or brown secretion of the flowering tops of the cannabis plant, which is made into a powder or pressed into slabs or cakes.

Cannabis oil or "hash oil" is a liquid extracted from either the dried plant material or the resin.

### **How is it taken?**

All forms of cannabis are usually smoked. Cannabis resin and oil can also be swallowed or brewed in tea.

### **How does it affect users?**

Cannabis can make users feel pleurably relaxed and sometimes euphoric. Users may also experience a more vivid sense of sight, smell, taste and hearing.

### **What are the risks associated with cannabis use?**

In the short term, users have an increased appetite and pulse rate. Users also have problems performing physical and intellectual tasks such as driving a car and thinking logically.

With large doses, users' perceptions of sound and colour may be sharpened, while their thinking becomes slow and confused. If the dose is very large, the effects of cannabis are similar to those of hallucinogens and may cause anxiety, panic and even psychotic episodes.

Regular users of cannabis risk developing psychological dependence to the point where they lose interest in all other activities, such as work and personal relationships. Recent studies in the United Kingdom show a link between cannabis use and an increase in schizophrenia.

### **Other risks**

Cannabis smoke contains 50 per cent more tar than high-tar cigarettes, which puts users at an increased risk of lung cancer and other respiratory diseases.

## Cannabis changed my brother

My brother used to be kind, funny, intelligent, thoughtful and caring, now I don't know him anymore; this is through drugs.

I want young drug users to understand that you don't only ruin your own lives with drugs, but that of everyone you are supposed to love around you. Have you ever considered this? Or do these drugs fill you with such selfishness that all you can think about is yourself?

My brother is not a hard drug user to my knowledge but has a heavy addiction to cannabis. Well, if you think this is one of the lighter drugs you are truly deluded.

Cannabis in my brother's case has changed his personality so much so that I feel I do not know the person living in the next bedroom. He has no ambition, no respect and no care for personal hygiene.

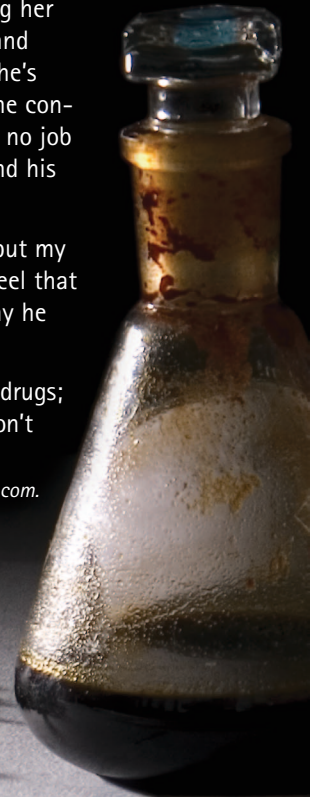
The only people he seems to care about are his friends who are also addicted to drugs.

My mum is extremely kind and loving, and he frequently abuses this by taking her for granted at every opportunity and making her feel worthless. When he's out every night with his friends she constantly worries about him. He has no job and no money and I suspect he and his friends steal from our house.

If he knew or cared what he has put my mum through, I doubt he would feel that taking drugs and behaving the way he does would be worth it.

I am 21 and have never taken any drugs; do I feel like I am missing out? I don't think so!

*Anonymous story submitted to talktofrank.com.  
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## What is it?

Cocaine is a fine white or off-white powder that acts as a powerful stimulant. It is extracted from the leaves of the coca plant. On the street, it can be diluted or "cut" with other substances to increase the quantity. Crack is cocaine that has been further processed with ammonia or sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) and looks like small flakes or rocks.

## How is it taken?

Cocaine is usually sniffed/snorted or injected, whereas crack is smoked.

## How does it affect users?

Cocaine can make users feel exhilarated and euphoric. Furthermore, users often experience a temporary increase in alertness and energy levels and delayed hunger and fatigue.

## What are the risks associated with cocaine use?

Short-term effects include loss of appetite, faster breathing and increased body temperature and heart rate. Users may behave bizarrely, erratically and sometimes violently.

Excessive doses of cocaine may lead to convulsions, seizures, stroke, cerebral haemorrhage or heart failure.

Long-term users of cocaine risk a number of health problems, some of them depending on how they take the drug. Sniffing cocaine severely damages nose tissue; smoking can cause respiratory problems; whilst injection can lead to abscesses and infectious diseases. Other risks, regardless of how the drug is taken, include strong psychological dependence, malnutrition, weight loss, disorientation, apathy and a state similar to paranoid psychosis.

## Other risks

Mixing cocaine with alcohol is a dangerous cocktail and can greatly increase the chances of sudden death.





### **What is it?**

Ecstasy is a psychoactive stimulant, usually made in illegal laboratories. In fact, the term "ecstasy" has evolved and no longer refers to a single substance but a range of substances similar in effect on users. Frequently, any tablet with a logo is now referred to as "ecstasy" regardless of its chemical makeup.

While the drug is usually distributed as a tablet, it can also be a powder or capsule. Tablets can have many different shapes and sizes.

### **How is it taken?**

It is usually swallowed but can also be snorted or injected.

### **How does it affect users?**

Ecstasy can heighten users' empathy levels and induce a feeling of closeness to people around them. It can also make users feel more sociable and energetic.

### **What are the risks associated with ecstasy use?**

In the short term, ecstasy can make the body ignore distress signals such as dehydration, dizziness and exhaustion and it can interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature. Furthermore, ecstasy can severely damage organs such as the liver and the kidneys. Use can lead to convulsions and heart failure.

Large doses of ecstasy also cause restlessness, anxiety and severe hallucinations.

Long-term ecstasy use can damage certain parts of the brain, resulting in serious depression and memory loss.

### **Other risks**

Tablets or pills that are sold as "ecstasy" may contain other potentially dangerous substances which can vary widely in strength and effects.

## What is it?

Heroin is an addictive drug with pain-killing properties processed from morphine, a naturally occurring substance from the opium poppy plant. Pure heroin is a white powder. Street heroin is usually brownish white because it is diluted or "cut" with impurities, meaning each dose is different.

## How is it taken?

It is usually injected but can also be snorted, smoked or inhaled.

## How does it affect users?

Heroin can relieve users' tension, anxiety and depression. Users feel detached from emotional or physical distress or pain. With large doses, users may experience euphoria.

## What are the risks associated with heroin use?

Short-term effects include constricted pupils, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, inability to concentrate and apathy.

Heroin is very addictive and users may quickly develop physical and psychological dependence. They also risk developing tolerance for the drug, which means they need constantly higher doses to achieve the effect they want.

Long-term heroin use has a variety of severe health effects. Among other things, it can cause severe weight loss, malnutrition and constipation. It can also lead to menstrual irregularity, sedation and chronic apathy.

Abruptly quitting heroin use leads to withdrawal symptoms which can be severe such as cramps, diarrhoea, tremors, panic, runny nose, chills and sweats.

## Other risks

Users risk overdosing on heroin, which can lead to coma and death through respiratory depression.





LSD is one of the most potent hallucinogens, or "psychedelics." These are drugs that alter users' state of consciousness and produce different kinds of hallucinations. Other hallucinogens are phencyclidine (PCP), hallucinogenic amphetamines, mescaline and psilocybe mushrooms.

### What is it?

LSD is a semi-synthetic drug derived from lysergic acid, which is found in a fungus that grows on rye and other grains.

LSD, commonly referred to as "acid", is usually sold on the street as small squares of blotting paper with drops containing the drug. It can also be sold as tablets, capsules or occasionally in liquid form. It is a colourless, odourless substance with a slightly bitter taste.

### How is it taken?

It is usually swallowed.

### How does it affect users?

Taking LSD leads to strong changes in thought, mood and senses in addition to feelings of empathy and sociability. However, the exact effects of LSD vary depending on the

mental state of the user and the environment when taking the drug.

### What are the risks associated with LSD use?

Short-term, LSD produces delusions and distorted perceptions. The user's sense of depth and time changes and colours, sound and touch seem more intense.

Some LSD users experience severe, terrifying thoughts and feelings such as fear of losing control, fear of insanity and death, and despair.

The physical effects are small compared to the psychological and emotional effects. They include dilated pupils, increased heart rate and blood pressure, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, dry mouth and tremors.

# Methamphetamine

Crack meth/Ice/Crystal meth/Tik/Shabu/Yaba



## What is it?

Methamphetamine is part of the group of drugs called amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS). It is a synthetic drug that is usually manufactured in illegal laboratories. Methamphetamine comes as a powder, tablet or as crystals that look like shards of glass.

## How is it taken?

It can be swallowed, sniffed/snorted, smoked or injected.

## How does it affect users?

Methamphetamine stimulates a feeling of physical and mental well being, as well as a surge of euphoria and exhilaration. Users experience a temporary rise in energy, often perceived to improve their performance at manual or intellectual tasks. Users also experience delayed hunger and fatigue.

## What are the risks associated with methamphetamine use?

Short-term, users can lose their appetite and start breathing faster. Their heart rate and blood pressure may increase and their body temperature may rise and cause sweating. With large doses, users can feel restless and irritable and can experience panic attacks.

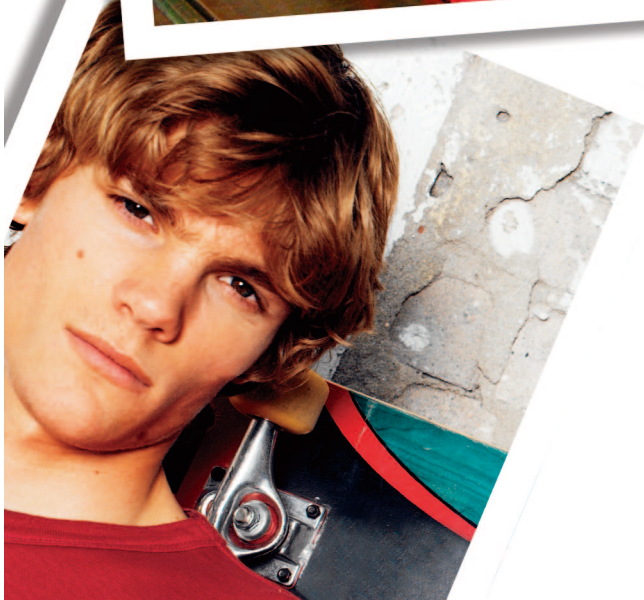
Excessive doses of methamphetamine can lead to convulsions, seizures and death from respiratory failure, stroke or heart failure. Long-term methamphetamine use can lead to malnutrition, weight loss and the development of psychological dependence.

Once chronic users stop taking methamphetamine, a long period of sleep, and then depression, usually follows.

## Other risks

Methamphetamine use sometimes triggers aggressive, violent and bizarre behaviour among users.

# Coping with peer pressure



- Think about where you stand on issues like sex, drugs and alcohol. Prepare by thinking through how you want to respond and behave in situations where these things come up.
- Nobody should have to justify a decision not to take drugs. Whether you have a strong personal commitment, or just don't want it this time, your choices are your business.
- If you're offered drugs you don't want, say no firmly but clearly and without making a big deal about it. If they try to persuade you, humour can be an effective way to deal with the situation.
- Having the strength to say "no" can be hard. However, it also feels good to stick with what you believe in. Explaining to people in a calm way why you don't want to be part of something may earn you respect from others.
- Finding out about the different drugs, from the effects to the risks involved, can help you resist pressure. As your understanding grows, so will your confidence.
- It's natural to want to fit in with friends. After all, nobody likes to stand out from the crowd for the wrong reasons. We need to feel that we belong. Still, although they may not show it immediately, your friends will respect you more if you're clear about what you want and what you don't want to do.
- It might not seem like it, but you're not the only one worrying about what other people think of you. Try to focus on your own opinion of yourself—in the end, that's all that matters.
- Peer pressure is often a way for people to seek approval for their own behaviour. Do you really want to get involved to help justify someone else's drug use?



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Vienna International Centre, PO Box 500, 1400 Vienna, Austria  
Tel: (+43-1) 26060-0, Fax: (+43-1) 26060-5866, [www.unodc.org](http://www.unodc.org)

## WORLD DRUG CAMPAIGN

UNODC leads the global campaign to raise awareness about the major challenge that illicit drugs represent to society as a whole, and especially to the young. The campaign encourages young people to put their health first and not to take drugs.



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