



This briefing concentrates on the risks of drug misuse. But it's worth remembering that most people who use drugs do not come to serious harm.

HEROIN

White powder which can be swallowed, injected, sniffed or smoked.

Small amount makes people relaxed and content. Large amount causes sleep. Stops pain. Lasts several hours.

Short-term health effects

Can make people feel sick. Makes concentration and quick reactions difficult.

Long-term health effects

Damage to veins and skin and risk of infections like HIV and hepatitis if injected. Easy to become dependent with regular use. Withdrawal effects can be very unpleasant.

Law

Illegal to have unless prescribed by a doctor. Illegal to sell or give away.

Slang

Junk, smack, skag, H.

SOLVENTS

Glues, aerosols and gases (like lighter fuel), the fumes of which can be inhaled to get 'high'. Lasts about half an hour. Like being very drunk.

Short-term health effects

Risk of accidents and death (like vomiting while unconscious). Gases (aerosols, lighter fuels) and cleaning fluids can cause death through suffocation or heart failure.

Long-term health effects

Tiredness, poor performance at school and in sports. Possible lasting damage to body (liver, kidney, brain) but this is rare.

Law

Legal to have but illegal to sell to known or suspected young solvent misusers.

CANNABIS

Smoked in a cigarette or pipe, by itself or with tobacco. Can be eaten. Usually makes people feel relaxed and talkative. If someone's anxious or depressed, it could make them feel worse. Makes people more sensitive to sounds and colours. Lasts 20 minutes to several hours.

Short-term health effects

Makes concentration and quick reactions difficult. Will affect driving.

Long-term health effects

Possible lung damage if smoked.

Law

Illegal to have. Illegal to sell or give away.

Slang

Dope, puff, weed, blow, draw, blunts, smoke.

ECSTASY

Swallowed as a pill or capsule. In small doses produces effects similar to LSD. In higher doses, the effects are more like those of amphetamine.

Short-term health effects

Possible sweating, dry mouth and throat and raised blood pressure. Bodily coordination may be affected. Users say the drug makes them feel 'in tune' with their friends and surroundings.

Long-term health effects

If used repeatedly, person may become anxious, panicky or confused. A number of deaths have been caused by the drug. Evidence of liver damage.

Law

Illegal to have. Illegal to sell or give away.

Slang

E, plus many others based on the colours and shapes of the capsules (doves, burgers, etc).

STEROIDS

Swallowed as a pill or capsule and also injected. Used by some athletes and body builders to increase muscle size and aggression, by others to improve appearance.

Short-term effects

Users report that the drugs make them feel more aggressive and they can train harder.

Long-term effects

Used over a long period of time (which you have to in order for anything to happen), these drugs affect both men and women in different ways. Women may become more 'masculine' (eg deeper voice and smaller breasts) and these effects may not be reversible, even after the drugs have been stopped. In men, the reproductive system may be temporarily affected. Young people using these drugs regularly over a period of time, may stunt their growth. In rare cases, users have died of liver cancer caused by steroids.

COCAINE (inc. CRACK)

Sniffed, injected or smoked (crack). Effects very similar to amphetamines, except that cocaine only lasts for up to an hour and crack wears off even more quickly and the feelings with both are more intense.

Law

Illegal to have unless prescribed by a doctor. Illegal to sell or give away.

Slang

Charlie, coke (cocaine); rock, wash, base (crack).

LSD

Swallowed as a liquid on blotting paper. Effects very dependent on situation and mood. Can make things look and sound very different, and make people feel very differently about themselves and about the world in general. Lasts for 8-12 hours.

Short-term health effects

Makes concentration and quick reactions difficult. Some takers become very upset ('bad trip') which may last for days afterwards. May 'trigger' mental disorder in a few people who are on the verge of a mental breakdown.

Long-term health effects

Can re-experience part of a trip a long time afterwards.

Law

Illegal to have. Illegal to sell or to give away.

Slang

Acid, trips.

AMPHETAMINES

Usually sniffed as a powder and injected. Makes people more awake and lively. Lasts several hours.

Short-term health effects

Helps concentration for a short while. Feel tired afterwards.

Long-term health effects

Lose appetite for food. Can become very anxious and jumpy if repeated doses are taken every few hours leading to acute paranoia. Feel depressed and very hungry after stopping, so can be difficult to give up.

Law

Illegal to have unless prescribed by a doctor. Illegal to sell or give away.

Slang

Wizz, speed, sulph.

INJECTING DRUGS

This is the most dangerous way of using drugs. People will try to inject all kinds of drugs including heroin, amphetamines and sleeping pills. Anybody who uses any injecting equipment which has been used by somebody else runs the risk of becoming infected with HIV. Apart from HIV, those who inject drugs may catch hepatitis which affects the liver, and may also damage their veins or poison their blood. Also those who inject are more likely to overdose.

Your nearest source of more detailed drug information is: