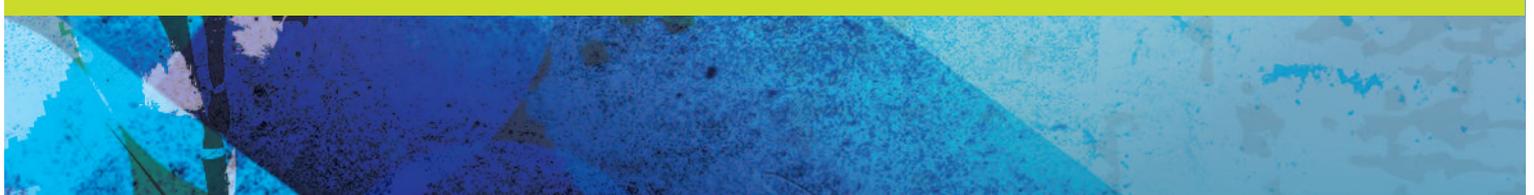


HEALTH ISSUES ARISING FROM DRUG USE



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Health Issues

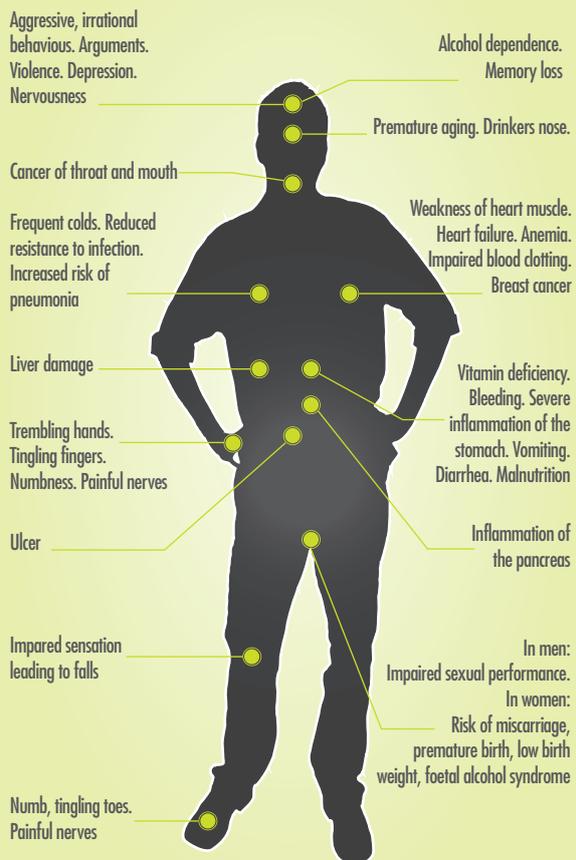
Arising from Substance Use

There are many physical and psychological health risks associated with problematic substance use. These can arise for many reasons such as poor nutrition and life style. They can vary from feeling "run down" to serious illnesses such as cancers. Some of the more serious physical conditions are outlined below.

Alcohol Related Harm

According to the World Health Organisation, the harmful use of alcohol is a significant factor in more than 200 disease and injury conditions. Alcohol is the most widely consumed, mind altering substance in Ireland with an estimated 76% of the population aged 15-64 using it (Healthy Ireland Survey, 2015). Alcohol related harm can be described as taking place along a spectrum. The low risk drinking guidelines from the Health Service Executive (HSE) state that when spaced out within a week, 17 standard drinks for a man and 11 standard drinks for a woman is considered low-risk in terms of harm. These guidelines do not apply to teenagers, older people, women who are pregnant, people who are run-down, on medication or unwell.

Some ways that alcohol can affect our bodies:



Amongst the diseases which can be directly attributable to alcohol consumption is cancer.

According to the Irish Cancer Society and other international research, alcohol consumption is known to cause 7 types of cancer:

- Mouth
- Larynx
- Throat
- Oesophagus
- Breast
- Liver and bowel
- Alcohol may also increase the risk of pancreatic, prostate, and skin cancer.

For more information about alcohol and cancer and ways to reduce risk, visit www.cancer.ie/reduce-your-risk/your-health/alcohol.

Alcohol related harm impacts on society as a whole in many ways. One in four hospital emergency department visits are due to alcohol related injuries, and 1500 bed spaces are occupied nightly within the HSE due to alcohol related harm.

Alcohol also has the potential to cause harm in many different areas of life including relationship difficulties, injuries, legal, and employment issues. Alcohol is a factor in one in four traumatic brain injuries and is a factor in half of all suicides in Ireland. Over, one third of road deaths involve alcohol. In total 88 deaths occur each month which involve alcohol.

<http://alcoholireland.ie/facts/>

HIV and Aids

What is HIV and what is AIDS?

HIV stands for Human Immune-Deficiency Virus. HIV may lead to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). The HIV virus affects the body's immune system so that it cannot fight off infections and illnesses such as pneumonia, skin cancer and fungal infections. AIDS can develop only in the body of someone who has been infected with the HIV virus.

The HIV virus can be transmitted through the exchange of body fluids. This includes semen, vaginal secretions and blood. There is currently no cure for HIV or AIDS.

HIV can be controlled with proper treatment and medical care and many infected people can live long and relatively healthy lives. It is important to contact your GP if you have concerns regarding HIV.

Hepatitis C

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis is a disease caused by a virus that infects the liver. In time it can lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer and liver failure. Hepatitis C is much more easily transmitted than HIV as it is a stronger virus. Many people may not know they have hepatitis C until they already have some liver damage. This may take many years. Some people get hepatitis C for a short time and then get better. This is called acute hepatitis C. Most people who are infected with the virus go on to develop long term, or chronic hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C is spread by contact with an infected person's blood. Treatments are effective in many cases. Some people undergoing treatment for Hepatitis C may experience side effects. New drugs are being developed all the time. It is important to talk to your GP if you are concerned about Hepatitis C.

Needle Exchange Services

The purpose of needle exchange is to prevent the spread of blood borne viruses (HIV and Hepatitis) among injecting drug users. This is also part of the harm reduction approach and is run in many pharmacies nationwide. Contact local Drug Services for further information, contact details provided in *Information on Support Services Available* section.

Substance Use & Mental Health

Drugs are chemicals which can affect the brain resulting in changes in behaviour and mood. Most forms of substance use can reduce negative feelings, provide a temporary feeling of well-being and control, but ultimately can impact or compromise mental health.

Alcohol and drugs are often used to alleviate or suppress feelings of depression and anxiety but in the long run can worsen symptoms. One of the known side effects of substance use is the development of conditions such as depression and anxiety.

Those at risk of a mental health condition or having a pre-existing mental health condition

often find their symptoms worsen or new symptoms are triggered. Coping with substance use coupled with a mental health condition can be extremely difficult. This often requires a dual diagnosis where different medical professionals are involved in assessing and treating the individual.

Mental illness and substance use interact, often making each condition worse. This may have adverse effects on relationships, work, health, safety and wellbeing. It is important to seek medical advice, talk to your GP, in some cases a psychiatric assessment may be required.



Refer to Information on Support Services section or www.supportme.ie for details on supports available