

INFORMATION ABOUT DRUGS





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Information About Drugs

Definition of a drug

A drug can be any chemical that causes changes in the way the human body functions. These changes can be mental, physical or emotional.

THERE ARE FIVE MAIN CATEGORIES OF DRUGS:

DEPRESSANTS, such as alcohol, can be used to calm the mind, relieve anxiety and can cause sleepiness.

SEDATIVES and minor tranquilizers include the benzodiazepine drugs, such as valium. These are often prescribed to calm you down and produce a relaxing effect that is beneficial to those suffering from anxiety. They are also used to help people sleep at night. They have the same general effects as depressants.

OPIATES, also known as narcotic analgesics, are a group of drugs that are used for treating pain. They also produce feelings of wellness, happiness, and sleepiness. They are derived from opium which comes from the poppy plant and include codeine, morphine, heroin and methadone.

STIMULANTS are drugs that make you feel more awake, alert, energetic and confident. Stimulants also elevate blood pressure, heart rate, and respiration. Stimulant drugs include cocaine and amphetamines.

HALLUCINOGENS are drugs that produce hallucinations or dissociative experiences. Under the influence of hallucinogens, people can see images, hear sounds, and feel sensations that seem real but do not exist. Some hallucinogens also produce rapid, intense emotional swings. These drugs include LSD and magic mushrooms.

Many drugs do not belong to just one category. Cannabis, for example, can have depressant effects as well as causing euphoria. Ecstasy has both stimulant and hallucinogenic effects. Alcohol has stimulant as well as depressant properties.

Effects of Alcohol and Drugs

Alcohol and drugs affect everyone differently, based on:

- The amount taken
- The person's size, weight and health
- Frequency of consumption
- Whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- The strength of the drug (which varies from batch to batch)
- Mood prior to consumption

This section discusses the effects and risks of specific drugs taken by individuals. The wider implications for family members are often far-reaching and devastating. The consequences may include: family problems, relationship breakdown, social problems, financial issues, work difficulties and crime.



Most Commonly Used Drugs

Alcohol

Alcohol is by far the biggest problem drug in Ireland today and its overuse is responsible for a lot of societal problems. Alcohol acts as a depressant and the weekly low-risk limits are 11 standard drinks for women and 17 standard drinks for men. These should be spaced out over the week and not consumed in one sitting. It is recommended that people have at least two alcohol free days per week. A standard drink contains 10g of pure alcohol.

Drinking more than the low risk limits or binge drinking may cause harm.

Short-term effects and risks

- Effects start within 5 - 10 minutes and last for several hours, depending on the amount drunk
- Exaggerated mood: if a person feels happy prior to drinking, he/she is likely to feel happier, however, feeling low prior to drinking can worsen low mood
- Feeling relaxed
- Loss of inhibition and control which can lead to taking increased risks
- Affects coordination and slows reactions
- Impairs judgment
- Aggression and/or violence
- Slurred speech, double vision, flushed face and vomiting

What is a binge?

Binge drinking is a form of harmful drinking and the term is used to describe an occasion where too much alcohol is consumed. It is defined as an occasion where 6 or more standard drinks are consumed in one sitting.



Long-term effects and risks

- Risk of damage to the liver, heart, stomach, brain and other organs
- Risk of dependency or addiction
- Increased risk of cancer
- Alcohol poisoning – when the body has a toxic reaction against too much drinking
- Black-outs – Loss of consciousness or memory loss
- Depression and risk of suicide

Cannabis



Cannabis is also known as hash, marijuana, dope, weed, grass and has many other street names such as ganja. It is a depressant drug, which means it slows down messages travelling between the brain and other parts of the body. When large doses of cannabis are taken, it may also produce hallucinogenic effects. The main active chemical in cannabis is THC (delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol). Herbal cannabis is common and is generally made from the dried leaves and flowering parts of the female plant and looks like tightly packed dried herbs. Resin or hash is a black/brown lump made from the resin of the plant. There are different and stronger strains of cannabis plants that contain varying levels of THC. Cannabis can be smoked with tobacco in a joint, inhaled through a pipe or bong, or eaten.

Short-term effects

- Feeling sedated, chilled out and happy
- Nauseous
- Increased appetite - 'the munchies' or excessive hunger
- Increased pulse rate, decreased blood pressure
- Bloodshot eyes, dry mouth
- Tiredness

Long-term effects

- May damage the lungs and lead to breathing problems
- Has been linked with mental health problems, such as depression and schizophrenia
- May decrease sperm motility and suppresses ovulation affecting ability to conceive
- Regular use may affect memory, mood, motivation and ability to learn
- May cause anxiety and paranoia
- May affect coordination and reactions
- Increased risk of accidents
- Dependency

Cocaine



Cocaine is known as snow, charlie, "C", coke, rock, stone, blow and nose candy, amongst other names. It is a strong but short-acting stimulant drug and usually comes as a white crystal-like powder without a smell. Cocaine is normally sniffed up the nose and absorbed into the bloodstream through the nasal membranes. It may also be injected. Cocaine is usually cut or mixed with other substances.

Short-term effects

- Effects of cocaine start quickly but only last for up to 30 minutes
- Feeling more alert, energetic, exhilarated and confident
- Grandiosity, inflated self-esteem
- Short-lived intense high followed by a sudden low
- Feeling on edge
- Heart and pulse rates speed up suddenly
- Hyperactivity, dilated pupils, dry mouth, sweating and loss of appetite
- Higher doses can increase anxiety and feelings of panic
- Increased sex drive
- Risk taking behaviours

- When cocaine and alcohol are mixed, they produce cocaethylene, which increases the risks of damage to the heart or heart attack
- Extremely dangerous if injected with heroin, known as a 'speedball'

Tranquillisers

The most common type of tranquillisers are benzodiazepines. These are known commonly as benzos, tranquilisers, jellies, sleepers, moggies, roofies, downers, roches and D10's. Benzodiazepines are depressants or 'downers'. You can get them typically as a tablet or capsule but also as an injection or suppository. They are prescribed to reduce anxiety or stress, encourage sleep or to relax muscles and are sometimes also prescribed to ease the withdrawal symptoms from other drugs. Benzodiazepines are quite commonly traded as street drugs.

Long-term effects

- Tightness in chest, insomnia, exhaustion and inability to relax
- Dry mouth, sweating, mood swings and loss of appetite
- Aggression and/or violence
- Feeling depressed and run down
- Cravings
- Damage to nose tissue
- Kidney damage
- May cause loss your sex drive
- Risk of HIV and hepatitis if needles are shared
- Smoking cocaine may cause breathing problems
- Anxiety, paranoia and hallucinations
- Overdose can cause seizures, stroke, breathing problems and heart attack
- Damage to veins if injected

Short-term effects

- Effects start within 10-15 minutes and last up to 6 hours
- Depresses the nervous system and slows the body down
- Relieves stress, anxiety and tension
- Feeling more calm and relaxed
- Drowsiness, forgetfulness and confusion

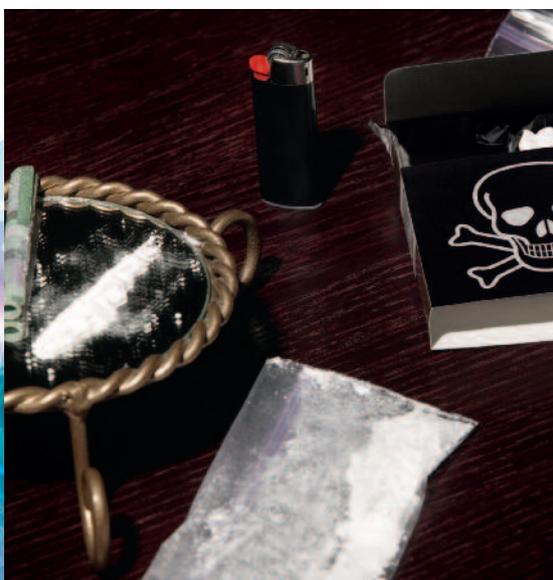
Long-term effects

- Short-term memory loss
- Anxiety and depression
- Irritability, paranoia and aggression
- Personality change
- Weakness, lethargy and lack of motivation
- Drowsiness, sleepiness and fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping or disturbing dreams
- Headaches, nausea, skin rashes and weight gain
- Addiction and withdrawal symptoms

Other dangers

- Sudden withdrawal can increase risk of seizure and/or death
- Mixing them with other drugs such as alcohol or heroin increases the risk of fatal overdose

Online and Head-Shop Type Products or New Psychoactive Substances



There are currently over 450 new psychoactive substances being monitored by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and more are being introduced all the time.

Legislation that was introduced in 2010 added a list of psychoactive drugs to be controlled substances under the 1977 Misuse of Drugs Act. The Criminal Justice (Psychoactive Substances) Act 2010 also made it illegal to sell any substance with psychoactive properties. This had the immediate effect of severely reducing the number of head shops operating in the country as anyone possessing a range of named substances faced a penalty of up to seven years in prison. A lot of these substances and party pills are now being ordered online however. Some of the more commonly used products are mephedrone and synthetic cannabis.

Mephedrone

Mephedrone (4-methylmethcathinone) is a stimulant drug and comes in different forms, including as a white powder with a yellowish tinge, and as capsules and tablets. It may also be known as meph, meow, meow-meow, m-cat, plant food, drone, bubbles, kitty cat. Mephedrone powder is usually sniffed/snorted or swallowed.

Short-term effects

- Rush of intense pleasure
- Feeling happy, energetic and wanting to talk more
- Intense connection with music
- Anxiety, Paranoia
- Jaw clenching, teeth grinding
- Light-headedness, dizziness
- Distorted sense of time, memory loss
- Nose bleeds from sniffing/snorting the drug
- Enlarged pupils, dry mouth, thirst
- Sweating
- Reduced appetite

- Stomach pains, nausea, vomiting
- Skin rashes
- Fast heartbeat, high blood pressure, chest pain
- Strong urge to re-dose

Long-term effects

- Difficulty sleeping
- Muscle spasms
- Seeing and hearing things that are not there
- Needing to use more mephedrone to get the same effect
- Dependence
- Financial, work and social problems

Short-term effects

Synthetic cannabis is relatively new, so there is limited information available about its short- and long-term effects, including how safe or unsafe it is to use. However, it has been reported to have similar effects to cannabis along with some additional negative and potentially more harmful ones including:

- Fast and irregular heartbeat
- Racing thoughts
- Agitation, anxiety and paranoia
- Psychosis
- Aggressive and violent behaviour
- Chest pain
- Vomiting
- Acute kidney injury
- Seizures
- Stroke

Synthetic Cannabis



Synthetic cannabis or synthetic cannabinoids are produced with man-made chemicals that create similar effects to delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the active ingredient in cannabis.

Synthetic cannabis is marketed under different brand names including kronic, northern lights, mojo, lightning gold, lightning red and godfather. It looks like dried herbs and is sold in colourful, branded packets. It is usually smoked and is sometimes drunk as a tea.

Long-term effects

There has been limited research into synthetic cannabis dependence. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that long-term, regular use can cause tolerance and dependence.

Amphetamines

Amphetamine is a stimulant. It can be a powder or tablet which you sniff, swallow or inject. Speed is an off-white or pinkish powder and can sometimes look like crystals. You can dab speed onto your gums or sniff in lines like cocaine using a rolled up bank note. It starts to affect you within 20 minutes and lasts for 4-6 hours.



- Injecting speed can cause vein damage and sharing needles increases risk of HIV and hepatitis

Over the Counter Medication



Short-term effects

- Exhilaration, increased energy and confidence
- Reduced need for food or rest
- Dilated pupils and poor pallor
- Increased heart rate, faster breathing and higher blood pressure
- Dry mouth, diarrhoea, need to urinate more often
- Higher doses also cause flushing, sweating, headaches, teeth grinding, jaw clenching and racing heart
- Talkative and aggressive
- Can sometimes cause drug-induced psychosis

A number of pain-relieving medicines can be purchased without a prescription. These are usually for treating mild to moderate pain, flu symptoms or high temperatures. If used for too long, it can lead to dependency/addiction. The effects of these substances vary according to type of medication used, for example, cough bottles, pain relief medication, laxatives and weight loss medications

Long-term effects

- Tolerance – Increased consumption required to get the same buzz
- Anxiety, depression, irritability and aggression
- Powerful cravings
- Increased aggression and violence
- Mood swings
- Mental health problems such as psychosis, paranoia, delusions and hallucinations
- Weight loss
- Scratching or itchy skin
- Sniffing speed can damage the lining of the nose

Short-term effects

- Relieve mild to moderate pain
- Drowsiness and slurred speech
- Lightheaded and dizzy
- Inability to concentrate or focus
- Shortness of breath,
- Nausea, vomiting, stomach pain,
- Excessive sweating, itching, or rash
- Constipation

Long-term effects

- Damage to the liver and kidneys
- Dependency/addiction
- Powerful cravings and withdrawal
- Mood swings
- Mental health problems such as psychosis, paranoia, delusions and hallucinations
- Weight changes

- Epileptic fits, seizure and paranoia
- Increase in body temperature, blood pressure and heart rate
- Feelings of intense emotions and love for people around you
- Anxiety, panic attacks and confusion

Ecstasy

Ecstasy is a stimulant drug that also produces mild hallucinogenic effects. Ecstasy tablets come in a variety of colours and shapes and often have a logo or design. Ecstasy is also known as E, MDMA, yokes, disco biscuits, doves, XTC, mitsubishis, pills or tabs. It is a very popular nightclub and party drug and in Ireland. It is normally sold as tablets with logos or designs printed on the surface of the pill. As with other drugs, there is always a risk that ecstasy tablets can contain other drugs.

Short-term effects

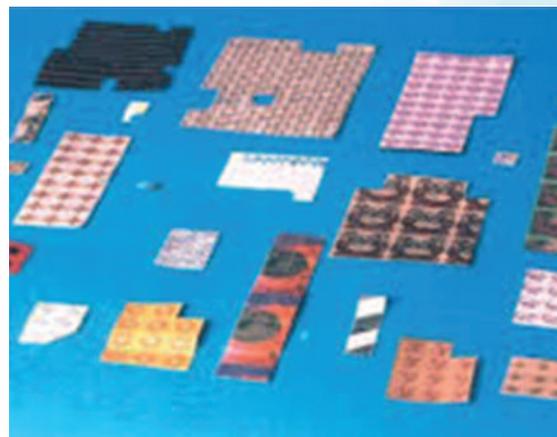
- Effects can start within 20-60 minutes and last for several hours
- Floating sensations
- Dilated pupils and jaw tightening
- Nausea, sweating, loss of appetite, dry mouth and throat

Long-term effects

- Weight loss
- Loss of interest in work
- Flashbacks and hallucinations
- Sleep problems, lack of energy and dietary problems
- Anxiety and irritability
- Bouts of depression, personality change and memory loss

LSD

LSD or Lysergic acid diethylamide is a hallucinogenic drug. It comes from ergot, a fungus found growing wild on rye and other grasses. It typically comes as a piece of paper with pictures on it, which you suck or swallow. It is also known as acid, tabs, strawberries, trips, blotter, dots and Lucy.



Short-term effects

- Effects start within 30 – 45 minutes and can last for 4 to 12 hours.
- Euphoria and wellbeing
- Dilation of pupils
- Seeing and hearing things that aren't there (hallucinations)
- Confusion and trouble concentrating
- Headaches
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fast or irregular heartbeat, shallow breathing
- Increased body temperature
- Facial flushes, sweating and chills
- LSD affects judgment leading to increased risk taking behavior
- Dependence

Long-term effects

People who regularly use LSD may eventually experience flashbacks. Flashbacks are hallucinations that occur weeks, months or even years after the drug was last taken. This can be disturbing, especially when the hallucination is frightening. Flashbacks can be brought on by using other drugs, stress, tiredness or exercise and usually last for a minute or two.

Magic mushrooms



Magic mushrooms are small hallucinogenic mushrooms which grow in Ireland every October and November and are known as mushies, shrooms, magics or liberties. They can be eaten raw, dried, cooked or stewed. Psilocybe and Amanita Muscaria are the two most common varieties but they are different types of mushroom with different effects

Psilocybe Mushrooms

Short-term effects

- Effects start within 30 minutes to two hours and can last up to nine hours
- The experience and effects vary as it depends on mood prior to consumption
- Distortion of colour, sound and objects
- Altered perception of time and movement
- Feelings of enlightenment and creativity
- Disorientation, fatigue and nausea

Amanita Mushrooms

Short-term effects

- Effects start after 30 minutes, and peak within 2-3 hours
- Powerful hallucinations
- Out of body experience, a person may feel they can 'smell words' and 'taste colours'
- Alcohol-like euphoria
- Deep sleep with vivid dreams
- Slurred speech and poor coordination
- Convulsions, muscle twitching
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

Long-term effects

- Flashbacks
- Anxiety
- Exacerbate or trigger any underlying mental health problems

- Nausea, vomiting and blackouts
- Breathing difficulties and heart problems
- Can kill instantly

Solvents

Solvents are aerosols, glue, cans of gas, thinners, nail polish remover, lighter fuel and so on. Solvent use, sometimes known as huffing, is the deliberate inhalation of gases, chemical fumes or vapours in order to get a “high” or “buzz” similar to the intoxication produced by alcohol. The fluid can be inhaled from a soaked cloth or directly from the can. Many common household and industrial products, which are perfectly safe when used correctly, can be abused.

Short-term effects

- Effects last up to 45 minutes
- Feeling of intoxication similar to drunkenness
- Loss of coordination and disorientation
- Sneezing, nose bleeds, tinnitus, coughing
- Slower breathing and heart rate
- Difficulties with vision
- Loss of consciousness
- Can cause a red rash around the nose and mouth

Long-term effects

- Brain, lungs, liver and kidney damage
- Abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting
- Memory impairment
- Dependency/addiction
- Permanent eye damage

Heroin

Heroin is also known as smack, gear, H, skag, junk, brown, horse or china white. It is a powerful and very addictive drug. It is a pain-killing drug made from morphine, which is derived from the opium poppy. Street heroin is usually a brown/white powder, smells acidic and is usually mixed with other substances. It is smoked, sniffed, or dissolved in water and injected.

Short-term effects

- Effects can start quickly and last for several hours.
- Feelings of warmth and relaxation with a hazy feeling of security
- Pinpoint pupils

- Pain relief
- Nausea and vomiting
- Dramatic mood swings
- Decreased breathing and heart rate slow down
- Constipation
- Drowsiness
- Injecting heroin causes a more intense feeling than smoking

Long-term effects

- Tolerance increases, more of the drug is consumed to get the same effect
- Chronic constipation
- Irregular menstrual cycle
- Increased risk of lung and heart disease
- Poor nutrition and self-care
- Increased risk of overdose particularly if used with other drugs
- Increased risk of overdose if a person uses again after a period of non-use.
- Damage veins
- Increased risk of HIV and Hepatitis through needle sharing
- Drowsiness, unconsciousness, coma or death
- Dependency/addiction

Signs & Symptoms of Drug Use

There are many signs, both physical and behavioural, that may indicate drug use. Each drug has its own effects, but there are some general signals that a person is using drugs: Bear in mind that the signs listed below could be caused by reasons other than drug use such as puberty, social changes or medical conditions. Try not to jump to conclusions about drug use, as you may be wrong.

Behavioural changes

- Loss of interest in hobbies, sports and other favourite activities
- Secrecy about activities, slyness, caginess
- New or different friends, perhaps an older crowd
- Staying out unusually late
- Changed sleeping pattern; up at night and sleeping during the day
- Using slang terms for drugs
- Poor work or school performance, may be skipping days
- Short attention span
- Always being broke and trying to borrow money
- Stealing from home or outside – money and things that can be sold for cash

Personality changes

- Becoming withdrawn and not wanting to talk to family members
- Unusual confidence

- Mood swings; irritable or grumpy and then suddenly happy and bright
- Hyperactivity

Physical things

- Sniffly or runny nose
- Losing appetite and weight
- Wearing sunglasses to hide the effects of drugs on the eyes
- Careless about personal grooming
- Red or glassy eyes
- Personality changes
- Bits of loose tobacco and cardboard and other drug paraphernalia
- Memory loss
- Using deodorant or incense to hide the smell of drugs
- Small burn marks on clothes

Remember, change is the most important thing to notice. Be aware if social, personal and family relationships begin to suffer.

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