

## **Health Risks Associated with the Abuse of Drugs and Alcohol**

Outlined below is a listing of drugs of abuse and their health risks taken from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration website. [A complete resource guide provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration can be obtained by following this link.](#)

### **Alcohol**

Alcohol (beer, wine, or liquor) has a high potential for physical and psychological dependence as well as resulting in increased tolerance. Possible effects include impaired memory, slurred speech, drunken behavior, slow onset, vitamin deficiency, and organ damage. Overdose may result in vomiting, respiratory depression, loss of consciousness,

and possible death. Withdrawal may include trembling, anxiety, insomnia, vitamin deficiency, confusion, hallucinations, and convulsions.

Females who drink alcohol during pregnancy may give birth to infants with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. These infants have irreversible physical abnormalities and mental retardation. In addition, research indicates that children of alcoholic parents are at greater risk than other youngsters of becoming alcoholics. Alcohol use is often related to acquaintance

rape and failure to protect oneself from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Additionally, alcohol-related accidents are the number one cause of death in the 16- to 24-year-old age group.

### **Narcotics**

Narcotics (including heroin, morphine, hydrocodone, oxycodone, codeine, and others) have a high potential for both physical and psychological dependence as well as resulting in increased tolerance. The possible effects of using narcotics include euphoria, drowsiness, respiratory depression, constricted pupils, and nausea. Overdose may result in shallow breathing, clammy skin, convulsions, coma, and death. Withdrawal may include irritability, tremors, panic, nausea, chills, and sweating.

### **Other Depressants**

Other depressants (including GHB or liquid ecstasy, valium, xanax, ambien, and barbiturates) have a potential for both physical and psychological dependence as well as resulting in increased tolerance. The possible side effects include slurred speech, disorientation, appearance of intoxication, and impaired memory. Overdose

may result in shallow respiration, clammy skin, dilated pupils, weak and rapid pulse, coma and possible death. Withdrawal may include anxiety, insomnia, tremors, delirium, convulsions, and possible death.

### **Stimulants**

Stimulants (including cocaine, methamphetamine, and methylphenidate) have a possible risk of physical dependence and high risk for psychological dependence. Tolerance can develop in all stimulants. The possible side effects include increased alertness, excitation, euphoria, increased pulse rate and blood pressure, insomnia, and decreased appetite. Overdose may result in agitation, increased body temperature, hallucinations, convulsions, and possible death. Withdrawal may result in apathy, long periods of sleep, irritability, depression, and disorientation.

### **Hallucinogens**

Hallucinogens (including MDMA, LSD, Phencyclidine, and others) are less likely to result in physical dependence, with the exception of phencyclidines and analogs, and vary in terms of psychological dependence, ranging from none to moderate (MDMA) to high (phencyclidine and analogs). Tolerance can develop. Possible effects include heightened senses, teeth grinding, and dehydration (MDMA and analogs) and hallucinations, altered perception of time and distance in other types of hallucinogens. Overdose may result in increased body temperature and cardiac arrest for MDMA and more intense episodes for LSD. Some hallucinogens may result in muscle aches and depression when in withdrawal (MDMA) or may result in drug seeking behavior.

### **Cannabis**

Cannabis includes marijuana, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), and hashish or hashish oil. All may result in moderate psychological dependence with THC resulting in physical dependence. Tolerance can develop in all forms. Possible effects include euphoria, relaxed inhibitions, increased appetite, and disorientation. Overdose may result in fatigue, paranoia, and possible psychosis. Withdrawal may occasionally result in insomnia, hyperactivity, and decreased appetite.

### **Anabolic Steroids**

Anabolic Steroids (including testosterone and others) may result in psychological dependence. Less is known as to their potential for physical dependence and increased tolerance levels. Possible effects may include virilization, edema,

testicular atrophy, gynecomastia, acne, and aggressive behavior. Effects of overdose are unknown. Withdrawal may possibly include depression.

### **Inhalants**

Inhalants (including amyl and butyl nitrite, nitrous oxide, and others) vary in their level of psychological dependence, with less known about their potential for physical dependence and tolerance. Possible effects may include flushing, hypotension, and headache, impaired memory, slurred speech, drunken behavior, slow onset, vitamin deficiency, and organ damage. Overdose may result in methemoglobinemia, vomiting, respiratory depression, loss of consciousness, and possible death. Withdrawal may result in agitation, trembling, anxiety, insomnia, vitamin deficiency, confusion, hallucinations, and convulsions.

### **Warning Signs of Drug / Alcohol Abuse**

Some common behavior changes you may notice if someone you know is abusing drugs and alcohol are:

- Sudden or extreme change in friends, eating habits, sleeping patterns, physical appearance, coordination or school performance
- Loss of interest in hobbies or family activities
- Hostile or uncooperative attitude
- Secrecy about actions or possessions
- Stealing money or an unexplained need for money
- Medicine containers, despite a lack of illness, or drug paraphernalia in the individual's room