

Easy-to-Read Drug Facts

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Effects of Drugs

Effects of Drug Use

Drug use can hurt the people who take drugs AND the people around them, including families, kids, and babies who aren't yet born.

Drug use can hurt the body and the brain, sometimes forever.

Drug use can also lead to addiction, a long-lasting brain disease in which people can't stop taking drugs on their own, even when they know that bad things could happen if they keep using them. Learn more about:

- how drug use and mental health problems often happen together (see page 5)
- the link between drug use and HIV/AIDS (see page 5)

Drug use can cause many problems:

- fighting and violence inside and outside the home
- money problems
- trouble at school
- trouble at work or losing a job
- trouble in relationships
- child abuse or neglect
- driving crashes
- arrests and jail

Visit the Easy-to-Read Drug Facts webpages listed under [Drugs That People Abuse](#) to learn more about effects of specific drugs.

Drug Use and Other People

Drugs can hurt not only the person taking them, but everyone connected to the person:

- husbands, wives, boyfriends, girlfriends
- teens and children
- babies
- other family members and friends

Drug use can hurt people at any age, from any financial, racial/ethnic, or education background. When you or a loved one uses illegal drugs or misuses prescription drugs, everyday life can feel out of control.



Drug Use and Families

Family members might fight a lot because of the problems the drug use is causing. The person who is using drugs might do and say things that upset neighbors and friends and make the family ashamed.

Some people who are [addicted](#) don't believe that they are sick and out of control, so they don't look for treatment. They don't see the problems they're causing. Other people who are addicted are aware of the problem but may be so upset and confused that they don't know how to ask for or get help, or they're afraid to stop using drugs.

Drug Use and Kids

When parents or other family members use drugs, the children can get hurt.

People with drug problems can forget to take care of the kids. There might not be anyone making meals or helping the kids get washed and dressed or dropped off to school. There might not be anyone to buy clothes or do the laundry. There might not be anyone to take the kids to the doctor or help with homework.

Drug use can make parents unable to work and earn money, and make them use up the family's money. The kids might go without heat, food, electricity, or even a place to live.

When family members with drug problems are at home, it may not be safe for the kids. These family members might not be alert enough to protect kids from accidents or from other adults who would harm them. There might be a lot of fighting. They might abuse or neglect the children.

If someone at home is dealing drugs or doing other crimes, it's also dangerous for the kids, and the adults could end up in prison.

When kids grow up with these problems around them, they are more likely to have drug problems of their own. Visit the Easy-to-Read Drug Facts webpage [Help Children and Teens Stay Drug-Free](#) to learn how to prevent kids from using drugs.

Drug Use and Unborn Children

When a woman is pregnant, a baby is growing inside her. If the woman uses drugs while she is pregnant, the drugs can pass to the baby.

Mothers drinking alcohol when pregnant is the most common cause of birth defects that can be avoided.

The baby might:

- be born small
- have problems eating and sleeping
- have problems seeing, hearing, and moving
- be slow to develop

While growing up, the child might:

- have trouble following directions and need to be told things many times
- have trouble paying attention and learning in school
- need special teachers and schools
- have trouble getting along with others
- act out and not understand the effects of doing bad things
- have a drug problem of their own

Children whose mothers used alcohol and drugs while they were pregnant sometimes need special medical care all their lives. Some might not be able to live on their own when they grow up.

Programs can help pregnant women safely stop drug use and can give care during pregnancy. Medicines can help treat pregnant women who are addicted to opioids like pain medicines and heroin, although some babies will still need treatment for withdrawal symptoms. But results are better for the baby if the mother takes treatment medicine during pregnancy than if she suddenly stops using opioids. If a pregnant woman tries to suddenly stop taking drugs and alcohol without medical help, she could harm the baby.

It can be hard for any person with a drug problem to quit. But women in particular might be afraid to get help during or after pregnancy. They might fear the law, social services, judgment from others, or lack of child care while in treatment. Pregnant women receiving medical treatment should talk with their doctor about their treatment plan.

Drug Use and Your Health

Drug use can hurt all parts of your body and cause health problems that don't go away.

Drug use, including smoking, can lead to diseases that can kill you, such as:

- heart disease
- stroke (brain injury from a blood clot)
- cancer
- HIV/AIDS



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Mothers drinking alcohol when pregnant is the most common cause of health problems in newborn babies.

- hepatitis (a liver disease)
- lung disease

A person high on drugs is more likely to have accidents while driving, at work, at home, at parties—anywhere.

Drug use can make people angry and violent. They can hurt themselves as well as other people.

Drug use can make people with depression feel worse—sometimes so bad that they want to end their own lives.

Drug overdoses can kill people.

Other Effects on the Body



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Drugs that slow you down, like heroin and pain relievers, can make you stop breathing.

Many drugs of abuse can cause problems such as heart attacks and high blood pressure.

Some drugs can hurt your lungs. Smoking cigarettes can cause diseases such as cancer and emphysema, as well as lung infections and coughing. Smoking marijuana can cause lung infections and coughing.

Drugs that slow you down, like heroin and pain relievers, can make you stop breathing. Inhalants can hurt your lungs and airways AND stop your breathing.

Many drugs—including cocaine, heroin, and pain relievers—can make your stomach hurt and make you throw up.

Drugs such as cocaine and heroin can hurt your kidneys. Sometimes the kidney disease is so bad that the person has to have hours of medical treatment (dialysis) every week. If your kidneys stop working, you can die.

Alcohol and inhalant abuse can cause liver disease.

Injecting (shooting up) drugs can hurt your veins. Using dirty needles can give you HIV/AIDS and hepatitis (a liver disease).

Drug Use Hurts Brains

All drugs affect the brain. That's why they can make you feel high, low, fast, or slow, or make you see things that aren't there.

Some drugs can hurt your brain and affect how you act and how your body feels. These problems might last just a little while, or they may last for the rest of your life.

Some drugs can make your moods change quickly. You might get sad, angry, or scared for no good reason. You might overreact to little problems. Drugs can make you act crazy. You might see or hear things that aren't there. You might get violent or think that someone wants to hurt you.

Some drugs can make it hard to pay attention, remember things, or even think clearly. That's why people often make bad decisions when they're on drugs.

Drug use can hurt your ability to enjoy things. When you're addicted, things that used to make you feel good—like seeing friends or watching a movie—no longer make you happy. Usually, you can start enjoying things again once you stop using drugs, but it may take time.

Drug Use and Mental Health Problems Often Happen Together

Many people who have drug problems also have a mental health problem, such as:

- **Depression**, which makes them feel very sad and tired.
- **Anxiety**, which makes them feel nervous, worried, and afraid.
- **Bipolar disorder**, which makes their moods change back and forth. They might be full of energy, excited, or even angry, and then feel sad, tired, and hopeless.
- **ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder)**, which makes it hard to pay attention, sit still, and not act out.
- **Antisocial personality disorder**, which makes it hard to have good relationships and care about other people's feelings.

And people with mental health problems like these are likely also to have drug problems. This is partly because drug abuse and mental health problems affect the same parts of the brain.

If someone feels really bad, they might try to make it better by using drugs. Unfortunately, that doesn't usually work for very long. Instead, they may become addicted to drugs and then feel even worse than before.

A drug problem can make a mental health problem worse. And a mental health problem can make a drug problem worse. Someone with both of these problems needs treatment for both at the same time in order to get better.

The Link Between Drug Use and HIV/AIDS

HIV is the virus that causes the disease AIDS.

AIDS is a disease that makes your body unable to fight off certain illnesses. We have medicines that can treat AIDS, but there is no cure yet. Most people just say "HIV/AIDS" when they are talking about either the virus or the disease it causes.

Drug use can put you in danger of getting HIV/AIDS.

When people are high on drugs, they don't think clearly. They might do risky things. They might have sex without using a condom to protect against HIV/AIDS, other diseases, and pregnancy. If they inject (shoot up) drugs like heroin, cocaine, or meth, they can get HIV/AIDS by sharing a needle with someone who is infected.

Doctors have learned that helping people to get off drugs also helps them avoid getting HIV/AIDS.

Visit the HIV.gov webpage to learn more about HIV/AIDS.