

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)  
**Drug Abuse Hurts Brains**



<https://www.drugabuse.gov>

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## **Drug Abuse Hurts Other People**

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Drugs don't just hurt the person taking them. Everyone connected to the person can get hurt:

- Husbands, wives, boyfriends, girlfriends
- Teens and children
- Babies
- Other family members and friends

Drug abuse can hurt people at any age, from any background, rich or poor.

Drug abuse can cause many problems:

- Fighting and violence in and outside the home
- Money problems
- Trouble at school
- Trouble at work, losing a job
- Trouble in relationships
- Child abuse, neglect
- Driving accidents
- Arrests and jail

When you or a loved one abuse drugs, everyday life can feel out of control.

## **Drug Abuse Hurts Families**

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When a person has a drug problem, they have a disease that can hurt the family.

Drug abuse puts a lot of stress on parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents—anyone who is part of the home.

When family members take drugs:

- You can't count on them to do what they say they will do.
- They may forget or get distracted because their focus is on getting and taking drugs.
- They might lie or steal money to buy drugs.
- They might get fired from their jobs.
- They might not come home at night.
- They may do bad things they would never do if they weren't abusing drugs.

Family members might fight a lot because of the problems the drug abuse is causing. The drug user 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 are causing themselves and those around them. Other people who are addicted are aware of the problem, but may be so upset and confused that they do not know how to ask for or get help.

## Drug Abuse Hurts Kids

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

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

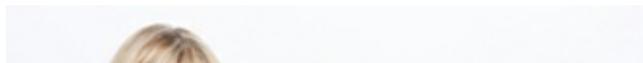
When family members with drug problems are at home, it may not be safe for the kids. They might not be alert enough to protect kids from accidents or from other adults who would harm them. There might be a lot of fighting. They might abuse or neglect the children.

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. [Click here to learn how to prevent kids from abusing drugs.](#)

## Drug Abuse Hurts Unborn Children

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

When a woman is pregnant, a baby is growing inside her. If the woman uses drugs while she is pregnant, it can cause the baby to have health problems.

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

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 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.

## **Drug Abuse Hurts Your Health**

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

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

- Heart disease
- Stroke (brain injury from a blood clot)
- Cancer
- HIV/AIDS
- 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 abuse can make people angry and violent. They can hurt themselves as well as other people.

Drug abuse can make people with depression feel worse—sometimes so bad that they want to kill themselves.

Drug overdoses can kill people.

## Drug Abuse Hurts Bodies

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Drugs that slow you down, like heroin and painkillers, 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 also can cause lung infections and coughing.

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

Many drugs—including cocaine, heroin, and painkillers—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 Abuse Hurts Brains

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Drug addiction is a disease of the brain.

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.

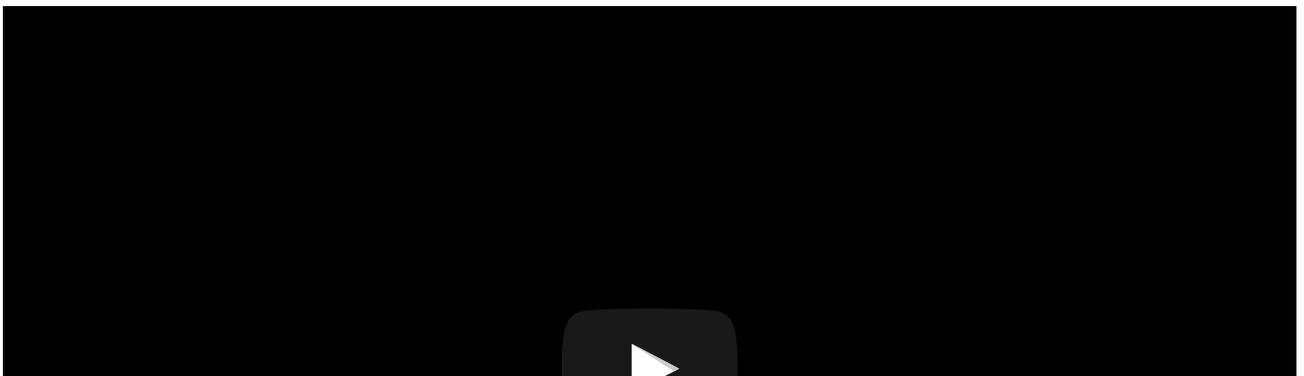
Some drugs can hurt your brain and affect how you act and how your body feels. These problems might last just a little while, or for the rest of your life.

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 think that someone wants to hurt you. You might get violent.

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 abuse 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.

## About Your Brain



## **Drug Abuse and Mental Health Problems Often Happen Together**

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More than half of people who have drug problems also have a mental health problem, such as depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder.

More than half of 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, 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 twice as likely to also 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.

The drug problem can make the mental health problem worse. And the mental health problem can make the drug problem worse. Someone with both types of problems needs treatment for both in order to get better

## **The Link Between Drug Abuse and HIV/AIDS**

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HIV is the virus that causes the disease AIDS. Most people just say "HIV/AIDS" when they are talking about either the virus or the disease it causes.

AIDS is a disease that makes your body unable to fight off illnesses. We have medicines that can treat it, but there is no cure yet.

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

When a person is high on drugs, he doesn't think clearly. He might do risky things. He might have sex without using a condom to protect against HIV/AIDS, other diseases, and pregnancy. If he injects (shoots up) drugs like heroin, cocaine, or meth, he can get HIV/AIDS by sharing a needle with someone who is infected.

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

[Click here to learn more about HIV/AIDS.](#)