

Drug Background Facts

Amphetamines (also known as speed, whizz, uppers, amph, billy, sulphate)

A common illegal stimulant, usually sniffed or snorted, but may be injected.

Amphetamines powerfully stimulate the nervous system giving feelings of alertness, boundless energy and confidence. They may cause aggressive behaviour in some users. The stimulant effects are particularly dangerous for anyone who suffers from any kind of heart condition or who has a history of a psychiatric disorder.

Over-stimulation results in huge extra demands on the body's energy reserves and one of the commonest after-effects is exhaustion combined with a reduced resistance to disease.

Immediate risks - anxiety; depression; panic; hallucinations; heart attack; poisoning due to adulteration of the drug

Long-term dangers - dependence; paranoia; damaged blood vessels; reduced resistance to disease; heart strain; mental illness

Cannabis (also known as pot, grass, dope, blow, wacky backy, hash, ganja, weed, puff, spliff, draw, marijuana)

Cannabis is a commonly used illegal drug in Britain. It is sometimes eaten, but more usually it is mixed with tobacco and smoked.

The most common effects from smoking cannabis are a feeling of relaxation, a sense of well-being and heightened perception of music and colour. Cooking the drug then eating it makes its effects more intense and harder to control. The drug may actually bring on a craving for food often referred to as having the 'munchies'.

Often referred to as a 'gateway' drug, leading onto the use of other illegal substances, there is no ingredient in cannabis which predisposes the user to try hard drugs. Although smoking with tobacco may lead the user to become addicted to cigarette smoking.

Immediate risks - accidents whilst under the influence; anxiety; impairs ability to learn and concentrate

Long-term dangers - paranoia and psychological disturbance; bronchitis; lung cancer



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Cocaine (also known as coke, charlie, snow, C), Crack

Cocaine is a powerful stimulant. Users sometimes inject it but more commonly grind it finely with a knife or razor blade and snort it through a tube.

The effects include increased excitability and alertness, indifference to pain, exhilaration, an illusion of physical and mental strength and possibly aggressive behaviour. These only last for a maximum of 30 minutes. Frequent doses are needed to maintain a 'high' and users are often left craving more. A cocaine habit is dangerous, expensive and hard to control.

Immediate risks - addictive; tiredness and depression for one or two days afterwards; fatal heart problems

Long-term dangers - convulsions; insomnia; weight loss; nasal damage

Ecstasy (MDMA) (also known as white doves, disco burgers, Adam, fantasy)

Combines the effects of a stimulant and hallucinogen. Drug is swallowed.

The effects begin after about 20 minutes and may last several hours. A heightened perception of colour and sound occurs.

Immediate risks - accidents whilst under the influence; depression; damage to liver and possibly brain; dehydration and heatstroke; sudden death due to kidney failure and 'water-logging'; poisoning due to adulteration of drug with other substances

Long-term dangers - possible brain and liver damage



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Tranquillisers (also known as tranx, benzos, eggs, jellies)

Prescribed drug for period of anxiety or tension. Taken orally. Temazepam, however, is commonly injected.

The effects of tranquillisers is to lessen alertness, but this can cause a release of aggression due to lowered inhibitions.

Immediate risks - accidental overdose particularly if combined with alcohol; delirium

Long-term dangers - withdrawal symptoms - confusion, anxiety, irritability, sometimes with convulsions; physical and psychological dependence; HIV and hepatitis if injecting

Barbiturates or 'downers' (also known as barbs, blues, reds, sekkies)

Previously commonly prescribed as sedatives to calm people down or as sleeping pills.

Immediate risks - accidental overdose; delirium

Long-term dangers - withdrawal with convulsions; convulsions and death; physical and psychological dependence

Heroin (also known as H, horse, skag, smack, junk)

A white powder which is sniffed, smoked or injected.

Users experience a feeling of total relaxation and detachment from pain and anxiety. They feel drowsy, warm and content, relieved from stress and discomfort. Prolonged use carries a heavy risk of physical dependence with heavier and more frequent doses needed to produce the same effect.

Immediate risks - toxic overdose; blood infection; poisoning from contaminants

Long-term dangers - physical and psychological dependence; malnutrition; respiratory complaints; HIV if sharing needles



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Hallucinogens (also known as LSD, acid, trips)

LSD is an illegally manufactured white powder which is mixed with other substances and formed into tablets or capsules. It may be impregnated into blotting paper onto which colourful designs are printed e.g. Pink Panther. These are placed on the tongue to dissolve out the drug.

Not addictive, the effect of an hallucinogen depends on the mood of the user at the time. Experiences vary from visions of joy and beauty to waking nightmares. Perceptions of the world are distorted and there is often a feeling of being outside the body.

A 'trip' (hallucinogenic experience) will usually begin about an hour after taking the drug and fade after about 12 hours depending on the strength of the dose.

Immediate risks - accidents whilst under the influence, unpredictable behaviour; 'bad trips'

Long-term dangers - 'flashbacks'

Solvents and Glues

Many solvents are sniffed from bags, but some aerosols are sprayed directly into the mouth.

The effects are similar to being drunk, but the 'hit' is quicker as the chemical is absorbed through the mouth, nose and lungs.

Immediate risks - accidents whilst under the influence; hallucinations and illusions; poisoning; burns; death by suffocation caused by misuse of plastic bags or freezing of respiratory system by spraying directly into mouth; choking on vomit whilst unconscious

Long-term dangers - damage to brain, lungs, heart, kidneys, liver and nervous system; dependence

