

## **Health Risks Associated with Drug and Alcohol Use**

The following is a brief summary of some of the health risks and symptoms associated with use of many of the most-publicized drugs, including alcohol and tobacco. This information was obtained from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (part of the National Institutes of Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and the Mayo Clinic.

Please note that individuals experience such substances in different ways based on a variety of physical and psychological factors and circumstances.

### **LSD (Acid)**

LSD is one of the strongest mood-changing drugs, and has unpredictable psychological effects. With large enough doses, users experience delusions and visual hallucinations. Physical effects include increased body temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure; sleeplessness; and loss of appetite.

### **Cocaine**

Cocaine is a powerfully addictive drug. Common health effects include heart attacks, respiratory failure, strokes, and seizures. Large amounts can cause bizarre and violent behavior. In rare cases, sudden death can occur on the first use of cocaine or unexpectedly thereafter.

### **MDMA (Ecstasy)**

Ecstasy is a drug that has both stimulant and psychedelic properties. Adverse health effects can include nausea, chills, sweating, teeth clenching, muscle cramping, and blurred vision.

### **Heroin**

Heroin is an addictive drug. An overdose of heroin can be fatal, and use is associated – particularly for users who inject the drug – with infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

### **Marijuana**

Effects of marijuana use include memory and learning problems, distorted perception, and difficulty thinking and solving problems.

### **Methamphetamine**

Methamphetamine is an addictive stimulant that is closely related to amphetamine but has long lasting and more toxic effects on the central nervous system. It has a high potential for abuse and addiction. Methamphetamine increases wakefulness and physical activity and decreases appetite. Chronic, long-term use can lead to psychotic behavior, hallucinations, and stroke.

### **PCP/Phencyclidine**

PCP causes intensely negative psychological effects in the user. People high on PCP often become violent or suicidal.

### **Prescription Medications**

Prescription drugs that are abused or used for nonmedical reasons can alter brain activity and lead to dependence. Commonly abused classes of prescription drugs include opioids (often prescribed to treat pain), central nervous system depressants (often prescribed to treat anxiety

and sleep disorders), and stimulants (prescribed to treat narcolepsy, ADHD, and obesity). Long-term use of opioids or central nervous system depressants can lead to physical dependence and addiction. Taken in high doses, stimulants can lead to compulsive use, paranoia, dangerously high body temperatures and irregular heartbeat.

### **Tobacco/Nicotine**

Tobacco contains nicotine, which is highly addictive. The tar in cigarettes increases a smoker's risk of lung cancer, emphysema, and bronchial disorders. The carbon monoxide in smoke increases the chance of cardiovascular diseases. Secondhand smoke causes lung cancer in adults and greatly increases the risk of respiratory illnesses in children.

### **Steroids**

Adverse effects of steroid use in males may include shrinking of the testicles and breast development. In females, adverse effects may include growth of facial hair, menstrual changes, and deepened voice. Other adverse effects can include severe acne, high blood pressure and jaundice. In some rare cases liver and kidney tumors or even cancer may develop.

### **Alcohol**

Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to serious health problems, including cancer of the pancreas, mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus and liver, as well as breast cancer, pancreatitis, sudden death in people with cardiovascular disease, heart muscle damage leading to heart failure, stroke, high blood pressure, cirrhosis of the liver, miscarriage, fetal alcohol syndrome in an unborn child, injuries due to impaired motor skills, and suicide.