

## Health Risks

Numerous health risks are associated with drug and alcohol abuse. Risks include, but are not limited to: death, low birth rate, birth defects, babies with drug addictions, fatal liver disease, heart disease, brain damage, ulcers, malnutrition, ability to work and study are also detrimentally impacted. In addition to health issues, numerous social issues are associated with alcohol abuse. Suicide rates, separation and divorce rates and homicides are more prevalent in people who have been drinking or have alcohol related problems.

Alcohol consumed primarily for its physical and mood altering effects is a type of substance abuse. It also can be used as a depressant, having effects of slowing down physical responses and progressive impairing mental functions. Lack of coordination, constricted pupils, slowed reaction rate, and slurred speech are among the signs of use.

Facts Associated with Alcohol consumption:

- 24,000 people will die on the highway due to the legally impaired driver.
- 12,000 more will die on the highway due to the alcohol-affected driver.
- 15,800 will die in non-highway accidents.
- 30,000 will die due to alcohol-caused liver disease.
- 10,000 will die due to alcohol-induced brain disease or suicide.
- Up to another 125,000 will die due to alcohol-related conditions or accidents.

Cocaine and its derivative, crack, have become an increasing source of addiction, hospital emergencies and death. These drugs act as an anesthetic and stimulant for central nervous system. They cause increased heart and respiratory rates, as well as elevated blood pressure. An overdose can cause heart rhythm abnormalities, heart attacks, and rapid death.

Cocaine and crack are highly addictive. Withdrawal causes intense cravings. When used during pregnancy, they can cause miscarriage, malformation, retardation, low birth weight, and withdrawal syndrome in the newborn. In adolescents and adults, chronic use often leads to deterioration of nasal tissues, chronic lung disease, heart problems, paranoia and psychosis. People who use these drugs may need help and support to stop.

Hallucinogens (LSD, PCP, ecstasy, mushrooms, etc.) are very unpredictable substances. They cause hallucinations and abnormal sensory feelings involving colors, lights, and sounds, which are influenced by the environment in which the user takes the drug. After use, frightening flashbacks can occur, and during use, impaired mental function can cause accidents involving injury or death. Users can experience panic attacks ("bad trips") and these trips can trigger long term psychotic behavior. Psychological dependence may also develop. Treatment consists of reassurance counseling and certain medications.

Narcotics like heroin, codeine, morphine, demerol, and talwin, are highly addictive drugs. They act on the central nervous system to reduce sensitivity to pain. They produce a "rush" and then euphoria. Some of the risks are death from overdose, and AIDS and hepatitis (from sharing needles). Withdrawal is painful and dangerous. In a short period of time, users develop physical addictions that require feeding their habit every three to six hours to avoid withdrawal symptoms. Treatment can consist of nonaddicting medications to help users detoxify.

Designer drugs are various kinds of street drugs that are developed in illegal laboratories. They can be similar to narcotics, stimulants or hallucinogens. They may cause neurological symptoms, like permanent Parkinsonism (a continual trembling) and death. Users never know quite what they are getting into with these drugs, and diagnosis and treatment can be very difficult, if not impossible. The consequences are unpredictable and can be permanent.

Prescription depressants, like Valium and sleeping pills, can cause physical and psychological dependence with long term use. Combined with alcohol they are the most common cause of accidental overdose and suicide. Fatigue, confusion, loss of coordination, and loss of motivation can be symptoms of abuse. When properly supervised by a physician, they can be safe medications, but withdrawal can be difficult and long lasting.

Anabolic steroids are sometimes (and inadvisably) used by athletes and body builders. They are often distributed illegally, exposing users to legal penalties. It is possible for some athletes to put on extra muscle mass if they use anabolic steroids while training with weights, but the side effects and long term consequences are extremely serious and far outweigh the short term gains. Users can exhibit aggressive personality changes and may also develop acne, insomnia, sexual dysfunction, secondary male sexual characteristics, and risk for HIV and hepatitis, if injected. Consequences in later life can include sterility, early heart disease and liver cancer.

## ALCOHOL AND DRUG TREATMENT RESOURCES

Please read the information presented on each site carefully and critically. We have carefully selected each site with the belief that it provides useful information, however, the following listing of sites is for reference only. **No endorsement of these sites is thereby meant or implied.** No representation or warranty concerning the quality or any other characteristic of these sites is being made.

<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

<http://www.drugfree.org/>

<http://www.nofas.org/>

For Resources in an area near you:

<http://www.drugrehablocator.com/>