

# Illegal Drug Use Information, Teen

Illegal drugs are chemicals and substances that are illegal to use, sell, or have (*possess*). Health care providers and pharmacies do not use or carry these types of drugs to treat medical problems because they can cause serious side effects and can lead to death. Examples of illegal drugs include:

- Cocaine or crack.
- Meth (*methamphetamine*).
- "Bath salts" (*synthetic cathinones*).
- Heroin.
- LSD or acid.
- PCP.
- Ecstasy.

## What is drug dependence?

Using illegal drugs often leads to dependence or addiction. When you use certain drugs over a long period of time, your brain chemistry changes so that you can no longer function normally without that drug. This is called drug dependence. Drug dependence can cause you to:

- Have unpleasant feelings when you stop using the drug (*withdrawal*).
- Be unable to play sports, have hobbies, or perform at work or school the way you used to be able to, without using the drug.

Some drugs make people feel so good that they want to use the drug again and again. This is called drug addiction. People who are addicted spend a lot of time seeking out the drug so that they can get the feeling they want from it. Addiction and dependence can be very hard to overcome.

## How can illegal drug use and dependence affect me?

Using an illegal drug only once can have a major impact on your life. It is possible to die from side effects after using a drug just once. If you use an illegal drug repeatedly, you may need to take larger and larger doses of the drug to experience the feelings you want. Becoming dependent on or addicted to a drug may lead to:

- Poor performance in sports, school, and hobbies.
- Withdrawal, if you stop using the drug.
- Negative effects on your relationships and work performance. It causes others not to trust you. You may avoid or neglect relationships.
- Frequent lying and crime, such as stealing to get money for drugs.
- Behaving in ways that do not match your values.

Drug addiction can also affect your future by:

- Limiting your ability to get a good job or go to college.
- Causing long-term health problems, such as tooth loss, changes in how your skin looks, heart and lung disease, and stomach problems.
- Putting you at risk for:
  - Overdose. This is a dangerous situation that requires hospitalization and often leads to death.
  - Jail or prison time.
  - A permanent criminal record.

## What are the benefits of avoiding illegal drug use?

Avoiding illegal drug use can:

- Keep your mind and body healthy. This can help improve your school, work, and athletic performance, and keep your brain focused on things that matter.
- Keep you from developing drug dependency or addiction. This can help you avoid negative side effects such as withdrawal and overdose.
- Help you have healthy relationships with your friends and family.
- Allow you to spend or save your money on things you would like to have, instead of using your money for drugs.
- Help you have more stable finances. Instead of using your money for drugs, you can:
  - Spend it on things you would like to have.
  - Save it in order to use it in the future.
- Help you avoid a permanent criminal record, jail time, or prison time. Having a clean record allows you to have more job and educational opportunities in the future.

## What actions can be taken?

To avoid using illegal drugs:

- Find healthy ways to cope with stress, such as exercise, meditation, or spending time with friends. Talk with a trusted adult or your health care provider about how you feel and how to cope with stress.
- Spend time with people who do not use illegal drugs. If your friends use drugs, make new friends who do not use drugs.
- Instead of using drugs, do something else, like a game, hobby, or exercise. Find activities that you can do with friends instead of using illegal drugs.
- **Do not** be afraid to say no if someone offers you an illegal drug. Speak up about why you do not want to use drugs. You can be a positive role model for your friends and set a good example for those around you.
- Talk with a trusted adult, such as a counselor, teacher, coach, or health care provider if you or someone you know needs help with drug dependence or addiction.



## Where can I get more information?

You can find more information about illegal drug use, dependence, and addiction from:

- Your school staff, such as a teacher, nurse, or counselor.
- National Institute on Drug Abuse: [www.teens.drugabuse.gov](http://www.teens.drugabuse.gov)
- Office of National Drug Control Policy: [www.abovetheinfluence.com](http://www.abovetheinfluence.com)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, national helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

## Contact a health care provider if:

- You use illegal drugs.
- You have missed school or work to use illegal drugs.
- You have lied or stolen to get illegal drugs.
- You lose interest in things you used to enjoy, like sports or family activities.
- Your eating or sleeping habits change as a result of drug use.

- You use medicines or household products to get the same effect as a drug. This is illegal use and can become addictive as well.
- You stopped illegal drug use previously and you start actively using again (*relapse*).
- You want help to change your addictive behavior.

### **Get help right away if:**

- You have thoughts about hurting yourself or others.

**If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. You can go to your nearest emergency department or call:**

- **Your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).**
- **A suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. This is open 24 hours a day.**

### **Summary**

- Illegal drugs are chemicals and substances that are illegal to use, sell, or possess.
- Using illegal drugs often leads to dependence or addiction. This means that you need the drug to feel normal.
- If you or someone you know uses illegal drugs, find healthy ways to cope with stress and talk to a trusted adult.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.