

# The truth about popular drugs

*If you're like most people, you've heard a lot about drugs. If you're like most parents, you're concerned about the dangers they could present for your kids, but you're not completely sure what those dangers are. Here is a brief look at some drugs that you may know of or have heard of in the media. For more information on these and other drugs, read AADAC's ABCs on our website at [aadac.com](http://aadac.com)*

## Legal drugs

The most commonly used and abused drugs are the legal drugs, which most people don't even think of as drugs. More deaths, illnesses and injuries are caused by alcohol and tobacco than by all of the other legal and illegal drugs combined.

- *Tobacco* – besides causing cancer, tobacco has been linked to causing lung disease, heart disease and many other health problems.
- *Alcohol* – drinking heavily over a long period of time can lead to serious health problems such as stomach ulcers, liver disease and many kinds of cancer.
- *Caffeine* – excessive coffee, cola and energy drink consumption can lead to insomnia, anxiety attacks, headaches and irregular heartbeat.
- *Over-the-counter drugs (OTCs) and prescription medications* can also cause problems, and can even be addictive, if they are not used for their intended purpose or if the person using them takes more than what is prescribed or recommended.

## Illegal drugs

These are the drugs you hear most about in the media. The good news is that use of these drugs is low; unfortunately, the consequences for the small percentage of people who do use them can be devastating.

- *Cannabis*, also known as marijuana and hash, is the most used illegal drug in Canada, among both adults and kids. Marijuana smoke causes many of the same problems as tobacco smoke.
- *Crack* is a form of cocaine that can be smoked or inhaled; in any form cocaine is highly addictive both physically and psychologically.
- *Ecstasy* can lead to death from dehydration, overdose or from a potent drug or toxin being sold as ecstasy.
- *Uppers*, stimulant drugs that were originally introduced for weight loss or to stay awake, deplete energy and can lead users to experience anxiety, hallucinations, paranoia or psychosis.
- *Methamphetamine* can be smoked or snorted (known as crystal meth) or swallowed (known as “speed”) and is highly addictive and destructive.

Drugs do not affect everyone in the same way. How a drug affects someone depends on the person (body size, health factors, metabolism, etc.), the drug (dosage, purity, etc.), and the environment in which the person is using the drug. Drugs taken in combination can have a much greater effect than either drug could have on its own (for example, alcohol combined with some painkillers has caused brain damage).

The best thing you can do is arm yourself with knowledge about drugs, so that you can openly discuss them with your children and be prepared if they ask you questions or start showing signs of drug use.

For more information, contact your local AADAC office or call the AADAC Help Line at 1-866-33AADAC. We are available to give you information and support.

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