



Drug Crisis

South Africa faces a drug crisis in which substance abuse is recognised as the greatest danger to its young people. In fact, statistics predict that we'll lose one-third of our young generation to drugs. And that, in case the penny hasn't dropped for you yet, is 30% of your friends and peers. Frightening, right?

Shocking Statistics

- Adults can become addicted to drugs and alcohol within five-15 years, but it takes only five-15 months for an adolescent and five-15 weeks for a pre-adolescent to become addicted.
- Alcohol- and drug-related car accidents are the leading cause of death among 16-24 year-olds.
- As many as 40% of teen suicides and accidental deaths are estimated to be linked to substance abuse.

Drugs are used for various reasons:

- to "cope" with pain, isolation, abuse or peer pressure;
- to "escape" from an ugly reality; or
- to enhance performance. The problem is that drugs eventually dominate you and make you unable to function on your own. So if you're tempted to try drugs, read this article.

Types Of Drugs

- Downers (depressants) weaken the Central Nervous System (CNS), making you feel drowsy and slowing your responses and ability to think.
- Uppers (stimulants) invigorate the CNS, causing massive releases of neurochemicals. These make you feel alert and awake.
- Hallucinogens stimulate sensory perception so that your senses are heightened and distorted.

Abused Substances

Substance abuse is often seen as the abuse of street drugs, but many substances, including medicine, have abuse potential:

While all abused substances are psychologically addictive because they entrap your mind, some are physically addictive too, because they capture your body.

1. Alcohol

Alcohol has two effects. First, it acts as a stimulant and reduces feelings of stress and worry. Then, as you drink more, it acts as a depressant. Alcohol is highly toxic and affects every body organ as it moves through the bloodstream. The brain centre that governs self-control is also affected by drinking and this causes aggression in some people. People are unaware that fine muscle coordination, sight and hearing are impaired by drinking; that brain cells are destroyed; and that brain activity is reduced. The eventual outcome of too much alcohol is sleep, breathing difficulties and even death.

Alcohol is psychologically and physically addictive, which is why it's illegal to drink it if you're under 18.

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2. Dagga

Also known as cannabis, marijuana, weed, pot, dope, grass, ganja or zol, dagga is smoked in cigarettes, in pipes or through broken bottlenecks. It can be eaten as cookies or drunk as tea. Dagga acts as a hallucinogen and a depressant. Containing over 421 poisonous chemicals, it leads to rapid destruction of brain cells; demotivation; distortion of time, distance and speed; damaged short-term memory; increased heart rate; watery eyes; lung problems; and hormonal disturbances, as well as cancer of the tongue, throat, lungs and stomach.

Dagga is a dangerous “gateway” drug because users can build up tolerance to it and move onto other drugs.

3. Mandrax

Mandrax, in which the active ingredient is methaqualone, is the most widely abused drug in South Africa. Mainly sold in the form of a tablet, it is often mixed with dagga and smoked in a witpyp (white pipe) or bottleneck to achieve a “rush”. Mandrax users can experience headaches, stomach cramps, depression, aggression, drastic weight loss, insomnia, toxic psychosis, epilepsy and loss of muscle control.

4. Heroin

Also called H, smack, china white, brown sugar or junk, heroin is a powder ranging in colour from white to brown. It gives a warm “rush” for six to 10 hours and is psychologically addictive, because when users smoke it or inject it, they need more and more just to feel “normal”. The side effects of heroin use can include drowsiness, loss of coordination, slurred speech, dilated pupils, dry mouth, constipation, menstrual irregularity and death due to overdose.

5. Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine is an addictive stimulant that damages brain cells. It can be taken orally, snorted, injected or smoked to cause a “high”. The short-term side effects of methamphetamine can include increased physical activity, decreased appetite, increased respiration, irritability, insomnia, confusion, tremors, convulsions, anxiety, paranoia, aggressiveness and hyperthermia. Over time, methamphetamine use can result in symptoms resembling those of Parkinson's disease, a severe movement disorder. It can also cause respiratory problems, an irregular heartbeat, anorexia, a stroke and even death.

6. Methcathinone (CAT)

CAT is a highly physically and psychologically addictive drug. Also known as the C, wildcat, wonder star, cadillac express and goob, it is most commonly snorted but can be taken orally or injected. CAT threatens serious organ damage due to ingredients like ephedrine, acetone, sulphuric acid (battery acid), sodium hydroxide (drain cleaner) and toluene (paint thinners). It's a powerful stimulant – raising energy levels, decreasing appetite and creating euphoria – but side effects can include anxiety, shaking, dehydration, stomach pains, increased heart rate, nosebleeds, seizures, paranoia and hallucinations.

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7. Ecstasy

Ecstasy tablets are associated with the rave culture, because users say ecstasy (E) gives them the stamina to dance for up to 18 hours. But experts call ecstasy the “death dance drug”! Originally used as a slimming tablet, ecstasy was banned due to side effects like dehydration, overhydration, nausea, vomiting, headaches, hallucinations, depression, paranoia (the feeling that others are out to get you), flashbacks, dilated pupils, jaw clenching and teeth grinding.

8. Cocaine

Also known as coke, snow, nose candy, shnarf or Charlie, cocaine takes the form of white powder or crack (rocks). It is a powerful upper which causes euphoria, but the depression between doses is so unpleasant that the user desperately needs and wants to escape into a high state again. This is why cocaine is the most psychologically addictive drug. Side effects can include insomnia, loss of appetite, paranoia, nasal irritation, loss of smell and taste, seizures, cardiac arrest and “cocaine bugs” – a crawling sensation under the skin.

9. Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD)

Also known as acid, A, candy, smarties or caps, LSD is a liquid preparation that comes in two forms: microdots (pieces of blotting paper) and purple hearts (tiny heart-shaped tablets). The side effects of LSD can include an increased heart rate, rapid pulse, increased blood pressure, dilated pupils, psychosis, mental illness and flashbacks which indicate permanent chemical brain damage.

LSD is the most powerful hallucinogen known to man!

10. Solvents/Inhalants

It is possible to abuse volatile substances found in ordinary household products like paint, paint thinners, correction fluid, lighter fuel, benzene, glue, petrol and other chemicals. The “high” is caused by the brain being starved of oxygen. Solvent/inhalant abuse can lead to liver and kidney damage, headaches, suffocation and brain damage, while side effects can include vomiting, coughing, intoxication, dizziness, slurred speech, confusion, delusions, aggressive outbursts, loss of consciousness – and death.

11. Over-the-counter and prescription drugs

Because over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription drugs are considered “safe”, we don’t see excessive or inappropriate use of these as “substance abuse”. But we should. OTC and prescription drugs can and do cause addiction and damage equal to that of street drugs!

Benzodiazepines (tranquillisers or sleeping tablets) are depressants used for anxiety and insomnia. When taken with alcohol or heroin, they can result in overdose and death. They negatively affect your ability to drive, reduce inhibitions and cause muscle relaxation. They can act as “amnesics”, harming your ability to remember things. The potential for psychological and physical dependence on benzodiazepines is high.

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- Opioid analgesics (painkillers) are abused because they cause euphoria. They are also depressants and may result in respiratory depression, seizures, comas and death. Analgesics often lead to the abuse of harder drugs and are therefore a stepping-stone to other types of drug abuse.
- Slimming tablets contain ingredients similar to those of drugs like ecstasy and can be equally damaging – largely because they are psychologically addictive. Side effects can include shaking, a dry mouth, heightened senses, decreased appetite, euphoria, insomnia, restlessness, anxiety, hyperactivity, hypertension, dilated pupils, paranoid psychosis, confusion, hallucinations, bizarre behaviour and seizures in sensitive individuals or those who overdose.
- Anabolic steroids are extremely dangerous and their side effects can include: psychological and physical dependence, aggression (“roid rage”), liver disease, heart attacks, strokes, sterility and impotence, permanent stunting of height, masculinisation in female users, muscle pain, easily injured muscles and slow recovery, acne and breast development in men.

Information courtesy of Drug Wise Phone (011) 728 6668 or visit www.drugwise.co.za

The Issues Behind Drug Abuse And Addiction

Young people often use drugs because doing so is a condition for friendship. Because we think it makes us cool. Or because we’re facing problems and stresses that we feel unable to deal with alone.

But the reality is that friendships based on drug use aren’t true friendships, it’s not cool and problems and stresses become even worse when we aren’t in control of our minds and bodies. Aim to substitute negative habits with positive, healthy “addictions” like exercising, reading, keeping a journal or watching sport. Challenge yourself in these areas and remember that you’re the only one who has to approve of your progress.

Narcotics Anonymous: Gauteng (011) 485 5248;

Western Cape (088) 130 0327;

KwaZulu-Natal (088) 127 8832

The South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (SANCA)

<http://www.drugaware.co.za/counseling.html>

NOTE What you need to know

- Street drugs are totally unsafe. The people who make them care nothing for quality and don’t have to follow strict procedures. So you could be getting anything when you buy illegal drugs – from crushed glass to rat poison.
- Drug dealers are ruthless - they couldn’t care less about ruining young lives or about young people becoming thieves or sex workers to support drug habits.
- Date rape is a massive danger. Drugs like flunitrazepam are used to spike drinks. They cause depression, which is aggravated by alcohol. They also cause muscle relaxation and impair short-term memory. So watch your drinks at all times. Pour them yourself or drink from a closed can or bottle.
- Read the pamphlets that come with OTC medicines to ensure that you know what you’re taking and where potential risks lie.

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