

# Appendix 1

## The most commonly used substances and their effects

It is important to remember that the effects of any substance will vary from one individual to another. This will depend on the quality and quantity of the substance and the person's age, gender, weight, mood, culture, expectations and state of physical and mental health. Street drugs are almost always cut (mixed) with other substances to bulk out the drug and maximise profit. As a result, the appearance and potency of drugs varies widely. Unless a sample of a drug is tested it is not possible to know exactly what it is.

With many drugs, regular users may develop tolerance. They may then require more of the substance to achieve the same effect. Users may alter their method of use to increase potency – for example from snorting to injecting. Users appear not to become notably physically dependent, but may become very strongly psychologically dependent.

Injecting involves additional health risks such as blood borne viruses including HIV and Hepatitis B and C; infection from sharing needles; septicaemia and damage to the heart valves. Some effects may prove fatal, especially if combined with other substances.

The following information covers the principal legal and illegal substances under these headings:

- Description
- Legal status/class
- Method of use
- Signs: description of common symptoms. (Note: these will vary and not all will be experienced)
- Sought after effects
- Adverse effects

## Stimulants (uppers)

Some stimulants are very strong – for example cocaine and amphetamines. Others like caffeine and nicotine are relatively weak. However it is smoking that causes the most severe long-term health problems.

### Overall effects of stimulants

Stimulants force the release of the body's own energy chemicals and stimulate the reward/pleasure centre. They also constrict blood vessels, speed the heart and raise blood pressure. Prolonged use of the stronger stimulants depletes energy resources, and triggers intense craving.

Stimulants can also cause or mimic mania, anxiety and/or depression or paranoid psychosis. Users appear not to become physically dependent, but may become psychologically dependent. Cocaine and amphetamine withdrawals can resemble a major depression. The direct effects of the stronger stimulants, combined with the exhaustion of withdrawal can cause or mimic a bipolar illness that includes manic delusions and then depression. Cocaine causes the most rapid stimulation and subsequent comedown of all the stimulants.

### **Amphetamines** - *speed, whizz, sulph, uppers*

A white powder or tablets.

**Use:** swallowed, sniffed, smoked or injected (by crushing the tablets).

**Legal status:** Prescription only medicine, Controlled drugs. Class B.

**Signs:** increased alertness and dry mouth, excessive fluid intake.

**Sought after effects:** elevation of mood, boost of confidence, energy levels or wakefulness, suppression of appetite.

**Adverse effects:** initial pleasurable rush followed by anxious feelings, exhaustion (leading to excessive sleep) and depression, irritability, and paranoia. Heavy users may experience severe weight loss and psychosis, hallucinations and delusions and may become aggressive.



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### **Anabolic steroids** - eg *nadralone, dianabol, durabolin, primobolin, stanozolol, winstrol*

These are synthetic drugs similar to natural hormones. They promote protein build up and therefore muscle gain.

**Use:** swallowed as tablets or injected. They should be taken in cycles of a number of weeks of using/not using but multiple mixtures and on-going use is common. Widely available in gyms.

**Legal status:** Prescription only medicines. Class C.

**Signs:** muscle growth and deepening of the voice.

**Sought-after effects:** to build up muscle size and body strength.

**Adverse effects:** Can be associated with mental health problems (eg mania and depression). They affect mood and can cause aggression and paranoia. Use is prevalent amongst young men who may have emotional problems and are drinking heavily. There is a high level of injecting, but users do not perceive themselves as drug users and do not engage with substance misuse services for clean equipment bringing associated dangers of injecting. There is also a recent trend in injecting insulin. There is an increasing supply of counterfeit products which do not attract the same controls for quality or dose as for licit steroids.



### **Cocaine** - *charlie, coke, snow, foot, lady, C*

A white powder, usually 'cut' or mixed with other fillers.

**Use:** sniffed, injected, smoked or eaten.

**Legal status:** Class A.

### **Crack cocaine** - *rocks, ready wash, ice, base*

Irregular lumps, looking like sugar, whitish in colour.

**Use:** crushed then heated and the fumes inhaled.

**Legal status:** Class A.

**Signs:** same as above, but effects can be more pronounced.

**Sought after effects of cocaine and crack cocaine:** a rapid intense high, Makes the user more confident and talkative. The high is only short lived leaving the user craving more. Can stimulate the sex drive.

**Adverse effects:** anxiety and exhaustion, long periods of sleep, irritability, depression and paranoia. Sudden rise in blood pressure and slowing of heart rate. Overdose can cause sudden heart attack or strokes after prolonged use. Highly addictive. As tolerance grows, the margin narrows between a dose producing euphoria and one that is fatal. Heavy users may experience psychosis, hallucinations and delusions and may become aggressive.



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Many cocaine and crack users also take other drugs, including heroin. In some parts of the country, users are engaging in the highly dangerous practice of injecting a mixture of heroin and cocaine (known as snowballing or speedballing). Alcohol is often involved too. When alcohol is mixed with cocaine, a third substance – cocaethylene - is formed. This substance lasts longer in the body, is more toxic, and causes more harm, especially to the cardio-vascular system. **(Taken from Know the Score: Crack and Crack Cocaine, produced by the Scottish Executive see [www.knowthescore.info](http://www.knowthescore.info))**

**Khat** – (also spelled *Quat, Qat and Kat*)

Leaves from the *Catha Edulis* plant - most powerful when fresh.

**Use:** users usually chew leaves or shoots for several hours and swallow the juice.

**Legal status:** the Khat plant is legal, but its active ingredients cathinone and cathine are Class C.

**Signs:** irritability, increase in spitting, talkativeness.

**Sought after-effects:** Mild euphoria, hallucinations.

**Adverse effects:** dependence can develop and heavy use can be problematic. Increased aggression, hallucinations, nausea, vomiting. Continued use can lead to cycles of sleeplessness and irritability and can in the longer-term lead to psychiatric problems such as paranoia and possibly psychosis.



Khat acts as a social lubricant in mostly Muslim countries, with links to (especially) the Yemen, Ethiopia or Somalia. Effects start after approximately 30 minutes with stimulation and talkativeness. This is followed by a relaxed and introspective state that can last up to 5 hours, often with an inability to sleep. This is then followed by periods of lethargy, irritability and general hangover.

Khat is also often used with tobacco. This brings additional associated risks such as respiratory problems. Mouth ulcers and problems in the digestive tract are also common among users.

## Sedative-Hypnotics (Anti-anxiety drugs)

Sometimes called anxiolytics or minor tranquillisers, these drugs are used medically (on prescription) and are also abused for their effects. When used to treat anxiety, they are called minor tranquillisers/sedatives and when used to treat sleeping problems, they are known as “hypnotics” or sleeping tablets.

Benzodiazepines are the most frequently prescribed sedative-hypnotics. They were developed as safer alternatives to barbiturates but tolerance, addiction, withdrawal and overdose still occur. There are also other problems with the millions of depressant drugs prescribed by doctors including polydrug use, cross tolerance and cross dependency. Dependency on benzodiazepines is extremely dangerous. Stopping use abruptly if dependent (usually 3 weeks or more) should be avoided and medical advice sought.

**Tranquillisers** – *temazepam* – (*te*)*mazzies*, *eggs*, *jellies*, *mogadon* – *moggies*

Pills, tablets, capsules in a variety of shapes and colours.

**Use:** swallowed or injected.

**Legal status:** Prescription only medicine. Controlled drugs. Illegal to possess without a prescription.

Benzodiazepines and minor tranquillisers (Class C).

**Signs:** see adverse effects.

**Sought after-effects:** increased relaxation and calmness.

**Adverse effects:** higher doses cause drowsiness, reduced co-ordination and concentration, anxiety and epilepsy.



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## Depressants (downers)

### Overall effects of depressants

Overall, downers, particularly where there is excessive use, can cause or mimic a depressed mood. They may cause loss of motivation and interest in surroundings, other people or oneself leading to self-neglect and even self-harm, including attempted suicide. Effects are particularly dangerous if combined with other drugs. Excessive sleep may be one of the characteristics of a major depression.

It is easy to overdose on downers, particularly where there is alcohol use. Where there has been regular or heavy use of downers, it is important that the person does not suddenly stop. Rapid withdrawal (especially combined with a withdrawal from alcohol) can cause serious problems including tremors, sweating, cramps, transitory hallucinations, stomach pains and even seizures or deliriums tremens called DTs.

**Alcohol** – *booze*, *bevy*, *pop*

**Use:** is taken orally. Alcohol is absorbed in the bloodstream and its effects depend on its strength and the individual. Food will delay absorption. Use is common among people with mental health problems.

**Legal status:** Can be bought by adults 18+ (or drunk outside a pub by children 5+) Need a license to sell.

**Signs:** include slow or slurred speech, poor co-ordination (see adverse effects below).

**Sought after effects:** if a person is not at risk (e.g pregnant, in recovery, or with mental or physical health problems) there are some benefits. In general, sedation, muscle relaxation and lowered inhibitions and increased confidence accompany low to moderate use.



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**Adverse effects:** with high doses, a range of effects occur from decreased alertness and exaggerated emotions to shock, coma and death. Effects are directly related to the amounts, frequency and duration of use and also depend on the tolerance of the user. Depending on a drinker's habits and susceptibility, organ damage, particularly liver damage, nutrition deficits and sexual problems can occur. Alcohol affects co-ordination and reactions, so users are prone to accidents. It is also the leading cause of birth defects in those cases where a cause can be attributed.

The effects of withdrawal from alcohol can be severe and requiring medical supervision for detoxification. These include hallucinations, seizures and DTs and in some cases death.

### Chronic drinking

As defined by the Department of Health, chronic drinkers are those who drink large amounts regularly. (Around a quarter of the population drink above the former weekly guidelines of 14 units for women and 21 units for men). Excessive, chronic drinking causes tolerance and tissue dependence. Withdrawal symptoms can occur upon cessation of drinking. Altered body chemistry can lead to dependence.

### Binge-drinking

This is taken to mean drinking to get drunk or drinking substantially above recommended daily guidelines in one session.

### Cannabis - *dope, draw, blow, resin, grass, skunk*

Like tobacco or a dark brown resin

Cannabis can have hallucinatory effects and stimulant properties, but is regarded mainly as a depressant or relaxant.

**Use:** smoked, eaten or drunk as an infusion.

**Legal status:** controlled drug Class C.

**Signs:** blood-shot eyes, hunger pangs.

**Sought after effects:** some users experience an intense feeling of relaxation.

If eaten, effects last longer than when smoked.

**Adverse effects:** can include lethargy, demotivation, panic, paranoia and short term memory loss. Heavy use, particularly if strong varieties such as some forms of skunk are used regularly, can lead to psychosis. There are also health risks associated with smoking.



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### GHB – *GBH, Liquid E, Liquid X*

A colourless liquid, with a slightly salty taste. Sometimes sold as 'liquid ecstasy', but is not related to ecstasy.

**Use:** by body-builders and on the club scene.

**Legal status:** controlled drug – Class C

**Signs:** similar to alcohol, with the user appearing drowsy or drunk.

**Sought-after effects:** slows body actions, euphoria.

**Adverse effects:** as dosage increases, euphoria is replaced by powerful sedative effects, with reports of nausea, vomiting, muscle stiffness, confusion and sometimes at high doses, convulsions, coma and respiratory collapse.



# Hallucinogens

The most commonly used hallucinogens are LSD, MDMA (“ecstasy”), PCP, mescaline and psilocybin mushrooms (magic mushrooms).

## Overall effects of hallucinogens

Hallucinogens cause intensified sensations, mixed-up sensations (visual input becomes sound), illusions, delusions, hallucinations, stimulation and impaired judgement and reasoning. LSD is very potent and can cause delusions. On some occasions, users can experience a “bad trip”, which can be very frightening both for the user and any onlooker. Flashback may occur for a considerable length of time after the original “trip”. Magic mushrooms cause nausea and create hallucinations. Mescaline used in sacred rituals and ceremonies cause more hallucinations than LSD, and designer hallucinogens like ecstasy are similar to amphetamines but also have calming and psychic effects. PCP, an animal tranquilliser, causes mind-body dissociation and a sensory deprived state. Ketamine (“Special K”), a powerful anaesthetic, is becoming more popular and has a potential for causing hallucinations and other ‘psychotic’ outcomes.

Hallucinogens generally are unpredictable and can trigger a latent mental illness. They can also cause or mimic delusional hallucinations and paranoia associated with a major psychosis.

### **Ecstasy** (or MDMA) - *E, adam, XTC, doves*

Tablets, powder and capsules in many shapes and colours.

**Use:** usually swallowed, sometimes can be injected and occasionally snorted.

**Legal status:** Class A.

**Signs:** increased energy, slurred speech.

**Sought after effects:** 20-60 minutes after use, user experiences euphoria which plateaus for 2-3 hours before wearing off. Feelings of empathy, meaningfulness and relaxation.

**Adverse effects:** tiredness, confusion, anxiety, depression and paranoia. Sudden death through overheating and dehydration or drinking too much water. A minority experience liver damage and strokes. Some users report panic attacks, paranoid psychosis and depression. Dependence is possible if taken frequently.



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### **LSD** - *acid, tabs, trips*

Small tablets or printed squares of paper impregnated with the drug.

Also comes in liquid form.

**Use:** swallowed or sucked, can be absorbed through bodily membranes such as the eyes or anus.

**Legal status:** Class A.

**Signs:** being detached from reality, giggly, unable to communicate coherently, slurred speech, lack of co-ordination.

**Sought-after effects:** to induce an altered state of consciousness.

LSD distorts shapes, colours and sense of time, producing hallucinations, laughter or exhilaration.

**Adverse effects:** can include flashbacks, anxiety and paranoia. Can precipitate relapse in those already susceptible to schizophrenia. Users often underestimate the length of a trip and feel exhausted physically and psychologically after a 12-36 hour experience. A lack of control and ability to stop the experience can frighten users.



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## **Mushrooms** - *shrooms, silly simons, mushies*

Mushrooms, a variety of wild growing fungi, native to the UK, such as the Liberty Cap. International varieties are becoming more widely available through specialist shops and the internet. The key constituent is psilocybin.

**Use:** eaten raw, cooked or drunk as an infusion.

**Legal status:** if prepared for use may be a controlled drug.

**Signs:** being detached from reality, giggly, unable to communicate coherently, slurred speech, lack of co-ordination, vomiting.

**Sought after effects:** similar to LSD, but the trip is often milder and shorter.

**Adverse effects:** can include stomach pains, sickness and diarrhoea.

Misidentification can lead to users eating poisonous varieties which can prove fatal.



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## **Opiates and opioids**

Opiates and opioids are natural, semi-synthetic, and synthetic derivatives of the opium poppy. The principal opiates and opioids are heroin, codeine and morphine. Others include methadone and other analgesics (painkillers), which are widely used.

### **Heroin** - *junk, smack, skag, H, gear, brown*

Sold illicitly as a powder, usually brown, but can be white.

**Use:** can be injected, swallowed or smoked – after heating it over a flame and then inhaling through a tube such as an empty pen. The most common street use is mixing it with water and injecting it. Diverted pharmaceutical tablets may be swallowed or crushed and injected.

**Legal status:** prescription only medicine. Class A.

**Signs:** slow shallow breathing, drowsiness and constricted (small) pupils, watering eyes & nose, itching, fidgeting.

**Sought after effects:** provide powerful relief from physical pain (for which they are used medically) and also of psychological pain. It induces euphoria, which may wear off but use continues to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

**Adverse effects:** running nose and eyes, irritability, tremors, chills. Sudden withdrawal leads to cramps, sweating and diarrhoea and “goose bumps.” Dependence develops after repeated use over several weeks. Not all users are dependent, but heroin is difficult to manage recreationally. Tolerance develops quickly.



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### **Methadone** - *doll, red rock, juice, 'script'*

Usually in the form of white tablets or liquid.

**Use:** swallowed or sometimes in injectable form.

**Legal status:** prescription only medicine. Class A.

**Signs:** slow shallow breathing, drowsiness and constricted (small) pupils, watering eyes & nose, itching, fidgeting.

**Sought after effects:** the effects are similar to heroin, however methadone tincture cannot be injected which helps to reduce the associated risks of this practice. Provide powerful relief from physical pain (for which they are used medically) and also of psychological pain. It induces euphoria, which may wear off but use continues to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

**Adverse effects:** Some people are sick the first time they take drugs like Methadone. For women, use can cause irregular periods (although conception is still possible). It can cause constipation.



Methadone is usually prescribed as a substitute for heroin either to stabilise or reduce use. It is also regarded as equally and sometimes more addictive than heroin. Sold illicitly either through selling on prescriptions or diverted from legal sources, it may be used when heroin is difficult to obtain. Many opiate users who are prescribed methadone may often seek street heroin to top up their dose either because the prescription is not high enough or the effects are not strong enough. Dose management, appropriate to each individual, is therefore extremely important.

Other substitute drugs for opiate dependency may also be used such as Subutex, with less of a buzz or sense of euphoria that methadone provides. Naltrexone is an antagonist, it prevents the neuro-receptors in the brain from picking up the effects of opiate drugs.

## Volatile Substances

More than 100 commercially available products are now used to get high. They include: lighter fuel, glues, rubber cement, Tippex™ fluid, nail polish remover, magic markers, petrol, paint and paint thinners, cleaning fluids, aerosols, fire extinguishers - the list is endless.

### Overall effects of volatile substances

The inhaled vapours are absorbed through the lungs and pass rapidly through the blood to the brain. They act on the central nervous system, sometimes as a stimulant but generally as a depressant, putting a clamp on that part of the brain (the cortex) which is believed to “check” primitive instincts. “Disinhibition” results.

General body functions like breathing and heart rate are depressed and there is a “stoned” feeling lasting from a few minutes to half an hour. Headaches, sickness and dizziness are not uncommon, particularly for novices. Continued or deep inhalation causes disorientation, drowsiness, numbness and perhaps unconsciousness - much like the effects of medical anaesthetics. The experience is said to be like that of being drunk and can produce euphoria, aggression, deep melancholy, giggling and raised libido.

### Alkyl nitrites (amyl, butyl and isobutyl)

- “Poppers”, *rush*, *locker room*, *hard core*

Clear yellow liquids.

**Use:** fumes from the liquid are inhaled. Effects are short lived.

Popular on the dance scene and in clubs.

**Legal status:** Pharmacy medicine.

Signs slurred speech, poor co-ordination.

**Sought-after effects:** an initial rush followed by light-headed feelings.

Used to facilitate sex (often among the gay community).

**Adverse effects:** fainting, loss of balance, headaches and nausea.

Swallowing the liquid can be fatal but is rare.



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### Solvents - (brand names)

Off the shelf products.

**Use:** sniffed or inhaled.

**Signs:** watering eyes and nose, poor co-ordination, slurred speech.

Sought-after effects: “to get high”

**Adverse effects:** use is most common among early teens (12-15) and is often short term, but can be very dangerous. Continued use can lead to numbness or unconsciousness, propellant gases can freeze the vocal cords causing asphyxiation. Associated dangers include accidents, choking on vomit or heart failure. Long-term use can impair visual and bladder function.



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