



UNITED NATIONS  
*Office on Drugs and Crime*

Types of

# DRUGS

under international control



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# Introduction

What are drugs? Technically speaking, they are chemical substances that affect the normal functioning of the body and/or brain. Not all drugs are illegal. For example, caffeine (found in coffee or Coca-Cola), nicotine (in cigarettes) and alcohol are all technically legal drugs, although they are usually not referred to as such. Medicines, whether prescribed by a doctor or available over the counter at pharmacies, are legal drugs to help us recover from illnesses, although they can also be abused.

Illegal drugs are drugs that are so harmful that countries across the world have decided to control them. Countries have passed several international laws, in the form of United Nations conventions, that specify which drugs are controlled.

All the drugs discussed in this brochure are illegal. This means that generally, it is against the law to own, use or sell these drugs worldwide.

Drugs tend to have several street names and this brochure will tell you some of them. However, it is not a complete list and

the drugs might have different names in your country or city. These names may also change over time. The street names do not tell you anything about the strength or purity of a drug.

All illegal drugs have immediate physical effects, which you can read about in this brochure. But drugs can also severely hinder psychological and emotional development, particularly among young people. In fact, drugs can take away potential that users can never get back because they become a substitute for developing other, natural coping mechanisms.

Although the drugs are discussed separately in this brochure, they are often used together. This mixing of drugs can have unpredictable, severe effects on the body and/or mind of the user.

Finally, drugs cloud the judgement of users. This means that drug users often take more risks, such as having unsafe sex. This can lead to them getting infected with hepatitis or HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

# Cannabis

Bongo/Ganja/Grass/Marijuana/Pot/Thai sticks

## What is it?

Cannabis is a tobacco-like greenish or brownish material made up of the dried flowering tops and leaves of the cannabis (hemp) plant.

Cannabis resin or "hash" is the dried black or brown secretion of the flowering tops of the cannabis plant, which is made into a powder or pressed into slabs or cakes.

Cannabis oil or "hash oil" is a liquid extracted from either the dried plant material or the resin.

## How is it taken?

All forms of cannabis are usually smoked. Cannabis resin and oil can also be eaten or brewed in tea.

## How does it affect users?

Cannabis can make users feel pleurably relaxed and sometimes euphoric. Users may also experience a more vivid sense of sight, smell, taste and hearing.

## What are the risks associated with cannabis use?

In the short term, users have an increased appetite and pulse rate. Users also have problems performing physical and intellectual tasks such as driving a car and thinking logically.

With large doses, users' perceptions of sound and colour may be sharpened, while their thinking becomes slow and confused. If the dose is very large, the effects of cannabis are similar to those of hallucinogens and may cause anxiety, panic and even psychotic episodes.

Regular users of cannabis risk developing psychological dependence to the point where they lose interest in all other activities, such as work and personal relationships. Recent studies in the United Kingdom show a link between cannabis use and an increase in schizophrenia.

## Other risks

Cannabis smoke contains 50 per cent more tar than high-tar cigarettes, which puts users at an increased risk of lung cancer and other respiratory diseases.

# Cocaine



Crack/Bazooka/Blanche/Cake/Coke/Lady

## What is it?

Cocaine is a fine white or off-white powder that acts as a powerful stimulant. It is extracted from the leaves of the coca plant. On the street, it can be diluted or "cut" with other substances to increase the quantity. Crack is cocaine that has been further processed with ammonia or sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) and looks like small flakes or rocks.

## How is it taken?

Cocaine is usually sniffed/snorted or injected, whereas crack is smoked.

## How does it affect users?

Cocaine can make users feel exhilarated and euphoric. Furthermore, users often experience a temporary increase in alertness and energy levels and a postponement of hunger and fatigue.

## What are the risks associated with cocaine use?

Short-term effects include loss of appetite, faster breathing and increases in body temperature and heart rate. Users may behave bizarrely, erratically and sometimes violently.

Excessive doses of cocaine may lead to convulsions, seizures, stroke, cerebral haemorrhage or heart failure.

Long-term users of cocaine risk a number of health problems, some of them depending on how they take the drug. Sniffing cocaine severely damages nose tissue; smoking can cause respiratory problems; whilst injection can lead to abscesses and infectious diseases. Other risks, regardless of how the drug is taken, include strong psychological dependence, malnutrition, weight loss, disorientation, apathy and a state similar to paranoid psychosis.

## Other risks

Mixing cocaine with alcohol is a dangerous cocktail and can greatly increase the chances of sudden death.



# Ecstasy



E/Snackies/New Yorkers

## What is it?

Ecstasy is a psychoactive stimulant, usually made in illegal laboratories. In fact, the term "ecstasy" has evolved and no longer refers to a single substance but a range of substances similar in effect on users. Frequently, any tablet with a logo is now referred to as "ecstasy" regardless of its chemical makeup.

While the drug is usually distributed as a tablet, it can also be a powder or capsule. Tablets can have many different shapes and sizes.

## How is it taken?

It is usually swallowed but can also be snorted or injected.

## How does it affect users?

Ecstasy can heighten users' empathy levels and induce a feeling of closeness to people around them. It can also make users feel more sociable and energetic.

## What are the risks associated with ecstasy use?

In the short term, ecstasy can make the body ignore distress signals such as dehydration, dizziness and exhaustion and it can interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature. Furthermore, ecstasy can severely damage organs such as the liver and the kidneys. It sometimes leads to convulsions and heart failure.

Large doses of ecstasy also cause restlessness, anxiety and severe hallucinations.

Long-term ecstasy use can damage certain parts of the brain, resulting in serious depression and memory loss.

## Other risks

Tablets or pills that are sold as "ecstasy" may contain other potentially dangerous substances which can vary widely in strength and effects.

# Heroin

Smack/H/Horse/Junk/Harry/White lady

## What is it?

Heroin is an addictive drug with pain-killing properties processed from morphine, a naturally occurring substance from the opium poppy plant. Pure heroin is a white powder. Street heroin is usually brownish white because it is diluted or "cut" with impurities, meaning each dose is different.

## How is it taken?

It is usually injected but can also be snorted, smoked or inhaled.

## How does it affect users?

Heroin can relieve users' tension, anxiety and depression. Users feel detached from emotional or physical distress or pain. With large doses, users may experience euphoria.

## What are the risks associated with heroin use?

Short-term effects include constricted pupils, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, inability to concentrate and apathy.

Heroin is very addictive and users may quickly develop physical and psychological dependence. They also risk developing tolerance for the drug, which means they need constantly higher doses to achieve the effect they want.

Long-term heroin use has a variety of severe health effects. Among other things, it can cause severe weight loss, malnutrition and constipation. It can also lead to menstrual irregularity, sedation and chronic apathy.

Abruptly quitting heroin use leads to withdrawal symptoms which can be severe such as cramps, diarrhoea, tremors, panic, runny nose, chills and sweats.

## Other risks

Users risk overdosing on heroin, which can lead to coma and death through respiratory depression.

# Hallucinogens

## What are they?

Hallucinogens, or "psychedelics", are drugs that alter users' state of consciousness and produce different kinds of hallucinations. The main types of hallucinogens are d-lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), phencyclidine (PCP), hallucinogenic amphetamines, mescaline and psilocybe mushrooms.

Acid/Hippie

# LSD

## D-Lysergic Acid Diethylamide

### What is it?

LSD is a semi-synthetic drug derived from lysergic acid, which is found in a fungus that grows on rye and other grains.

LSD, commonly referred to as "acid", is one of the most potent hallucinogens. It is usually sold on the street as small squares of blotting paper with drops containing the drug, but also as tablets, capsules or occasionally in liquid form. It is a colourless, odourless substance with a slightly bitter taste.

### How is it taken?

It is usually swallowed.

### How does it affect users?

Taking LSD leads to strong changes in thought, mood and senses in addition to feelings of empathy and sociability.

However, the exact effects of LSD vary depending on the mental state of the user and the environment when taking the drug.

### What are the risks associated with LSD use?

Short-term, LSD produces delusions and distorted perceptions. The user's sense of depth and time changes and colours, sound and touch seem more intense.

Some LSD users experience severe, terrifying thoughts and feelings such as fear of losing control, fear of insanity and death, and despair.

The physical effects are small compared to the psychological and emotional effects. They include dilated pupils, increased heart rate and blood pressure, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, dry mouth and tremors.



# Methamphetamine

Crack meth/Ice/Crystal meth/Tik/Shabu/Yaba

## What is it?

Methamphetamine is part of the group of drugs called amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS). It is a synthetic drug that is usually manufactured in illegal laboratories.

Methamphetamine comes as a powder, tablet or as crystals that look like shards of glass.

## How is it taken?

It can be swallowed, sniffed/snorted, smoked or injected.

## How does it affect users?

Methamphetamine stimulates a feeling of physical and mental well being, as well as a surge of euphoria and exhilaration. Users experience a temporary rise in energy, often perceived to improve their performance at manual or intellectual tasks. Users also feel postponement of hunger and fatigue.

## What are the risks associated with methamphetamine use?

Short-term, users can lose their appetite and start breathing faster. Their heart rate and blood pressure may increase and the body temperature may go up and cause sweating. With large doses, users may feel restless and irritable and they may experience panic attacks.

Excessive doses of methamphetamine can lead to convulsions, seizures and death from respiratory failure, stroke or heart failure.

Long-term methamphetamine use can lead to malnutrition, weight loss and the development of psychological dependence.

Once chronic users stop taking methamphetamine, a long period of sleep, and then depression, usually follows.

## Other risks

Methamphetamine use sometimes triggers aggressive, violent and bizarre behaviour among users.



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