

Myth 7 'Drugs just make me feel so good'

Stress is part of everyone's life, as are also everyday ups and downs and temporary feelings of disappointment, anxiety or sadness. Although some stress and discomfort are actually healthy and may actually help you to perform, learn, or just cope better, too much is too much, and can negatively impact your health or functional capabilities in the long-term. Everyone needs techniques to cope with stress and difficult feelings. To some, using drugs may seem like a good way to relax and feel good in general, and you might have encountered such views. This fact sheet aims to give you an accurate understanding of the real effects of some commonly used substances, so that whether you were convinced or not of the rationality of using drugs to feel good, you will be able to make better informed decisions after reading it, and know how drug use can impact your body and mind.

➤ **Drugs used for relaxation**

Some individuals use drugs because they seek relaxing effect. Especially in long term it might not be effective though, and might in fact decrease the overall energy levels and capabilities to function well and feel good. An interesting US study found that youth reporting using drugs to relax frequently showed lower well-being levels than those who use mood altering drugs only sometimes, and that those rarely or never using such substances had significantly higher wellbeing scores.¹ It illustrates how using drugs to relax may be negatively linked to lower well-being. Even though the direction of this relationship is unclear, we know that the illicit use of mood-altering drugs has many negative side-effects. To genuinely relax, there are plenty of safe and also tested tools available, from simple relaxation and mindfulness techniques to tools helping to better manage your workload and get enough exercise and rest. These ways to relax actually recharge you boosting also your mental capacities, whereas the illicit substances, such as Marijuana or sedatives, used for the same purposes, can for example negatively impact cognitive functioning.

➤ **Self-medicating anxiety or depression**

Symptoms like anxiety, depression or attention control deficit increase ones likelihood to use drugs as often young people with difficult feelings and low level of wellbeing try to normalize their mental health use of various substances not prescribed to them. This is called self-medication. In reality this may result in greater probability of missed, inappropriate, incorrect or undue diagnosis and treatment for cases where medical treatment would be needed.² Also, even if the use of these substance might temporarily lessen the difficult feelings, they will do nothing to address the cause behind them.

¹ http://www.gallup.com/poll/182192/mood-altering-drug-highest-west-virginia-lowest-alaska.aspx?utm_source=Well-Being&utm_medium=newsfeed&utm_campaign=tiles

² <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4012703/>

➤ **Real impact of some of the commonly used substances:**

Substance	Myth about impact?	True impact
Cannabis	Relaxing	➤ Slowed reaction time; problems with balance and coordination;
	Not dangerous	➤ Problems with learning and memory; ➤ Youth: possible loss of IQ points when repeated use begins in adolescence. ➤ Hallucinations; anxiety; panic attacks; psychosis. ➤ Mental health problems, chronic cough, frequent respiratory infections.
Prescription sedatives and/or Tranquilizers	Relaxing	➤ Slow brain activity and rebound effect when stopping use, possibly leading to seizures and other harmful consequences.
	Not dangerous (because legal)	➤ Using with alcohol: can slow both the heart and respiration and possibly lead to death.
DMX (often found in cough medicines)	Not dangerous, safe way for 'getting high'	➤ Hallucinations and loss of motor control, liver injury, cardiovascular problems.
Ecstasy	Intensifying senses	➤ Ignore distress signals like dehydration, dizziness, exhaustion
	Just being happy	➤ Liver and heart failure ➤ Restlessness, anxiety, hallucinations ➤ Damage certain parts of the brain
Methamphetamine	Being energetic	➤ Lose appetite ➤ Breath faster
	Physical and mental well being	➤ A large single dose can cause severe respiratory depression that can lead to death

The NPO “Partnership for Drug-Free Kids” has created an informative info sheet that gives you an overview on commonly used drugs, myths related to it as well as its effects on ones body. Get access to it at http://www.drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/drug_chart.pdf?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=post&utm_campaign=Back-to-school%20Survival%20Guide:%20Drug%20Guide%20PDF

➤ **Effective ways to relax and feel better**

- **Distraction** helps you to take your mind off of pain, stress or anxiety. It may include listening to music, reading, or **exercising – especially being out in the nature**, has shown to have positive impact on mental wellbeing and attention.
- **Slow deep breathing** can help to relax your body and mind and can be done at any time.
- Practicing to use self-control to relax your body and mind, for example via **progressive muscle relaxation** or **autogenic training**, can be a simple to learn way to feel better, replacing uncomfortable feelings with pleasant ones, increase blood flow, and to for example help you to sleep better.
- There are plenty of **mindfulness** how-to-guides out there in the internet!