What does the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) do?

NIDA is part of the National Institutes of Health. We are the largest supporter of the world’s research on drug abuse and addiction. Our goal is to better understand who uses drugs and why, and how drugs work in the brain and body, so we can develop and test new ways to prevent and treat drug abuse and addiction.

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Can marijuana be ADDICTIVE?

Yes. The chances of becoming addicted to marijuana or any drug are different for each person. For marijuana, around 1 in 11 people who use it become addicted. Could you be that one?


From age 13 to 18, Alby got high several times a day to help him cope. He went to school high and eventually dropped out. “I was losing focus. My attention went from 100 to zero. I was depressed,” he says. Now, after getting substance abuse treatment, Alby has been able to face his problems by talking them out with counselors and making new friends he describes as “positive.” As he puts it, “I feel a lot better about myself. I feel a lot sharper. I don’t feel lazy anymore.”
IF YOU SMOKE MARIJUANA A LOT IN YOUR TEENS, YOU COULD LOSE IQ POINTS (WHICH MEASURE INTELLIGENCE) THAT YOU MIGHT NEVER GET BACK.

QUIZ

Why isn’t smoked marijuana a safe medicine?

A. You can’t be sure what chemicals are in it.
B. Smoking anything can hurt your lungs.
C. It affects your thinking skills.
D. It alters your motor skills, making you an unsafe driver.
E. All of the above

Which of these webs is made by a spider that is NOT on drugs?

A
B
C

“Spice” (also known as K2):

A. Is sometimes misleadingly called “fake weed”
B. Has put people in emergency rooms with vomiting, confusion, and hallucinations
C. Is used mainly by smoking
D. All of the above

E. All of the above
C. No Drugs
D. All of the above
A lot of teens ask us about peer pressure, or why people do things that can hurt them just to fit in.
Why do people smoke when they know it’s so bad for them?

Maybe they smoke because they can’t stop. People start smoking for different reasons, but most keep doing it because of one reason — they are addicted to nicotine.

DID YOU KNOW? Research says that teens who see a lot of smoking in movies are more likely to start smoking themselves. Sometimes characters smoke to look edgy and rebellious; but sometimes it’s just about “product placement” — the tobacco industry trying to get into your head and your pockets.

Almost one in five 12th graders used a hookah in the past year? A hookah is a water pipe used to burn tobacco leaves. A lot of people think it’s less harmful than smoking cigarettes, but many of the health risks are the same.


QUIZ

Smokeless tobacco does not cause cancer.
A. True, it is the tar in cigarettes that causes lung cancer, emphysema, and bronchial disorders.
B. False, smokeless tobacco (such as chewing tobacco and snuff) increases the risk of cancer, especially oral cancers.

How many Americans die from diseases associated with tobacco use each year?
A. About 1,500
B. About 13,200
C. About 50,500
D. About 480,000

DID YOU KNOW?

E-Cigarettes
E-cigarettes contain nicotine—the addictive drug in tobacco cigarettes—and other chemicals that may be harmful.

More teens use e-cigarettes than tobacco cigarettes. Scientists have just started to research the health effects of e-cigarettes, but we do know one thing: users will inhale the same nicotine they get from a regular cigarette.

and driving can add up to tragic endings. In the U.S., about 4,300 people under age 21 die each year from injuries caused by underage drinking, more than 35 percent in car crashes.

About 4 in 10 people who begin drinking before age 15 eventually become alcoholics.

HIV

Getting HIV from unprotected sex

When you can’t think straight because you’re drunk or high, you may forget to play it safe.
Meth reduces the amount of protective saliva around the teeth. People who use meth also tend to drink a lot of sugary soda, neglect oral care, grind their teeth, and clench their jaws—all of which can cause what’s known as “meth mouth.” Meth users sometimes hallucinate that insects are creeping on top of or underneath their skin (called formication). The person will pick or scratch their skin, trying to get rid of the imaginary “crank bugs.” Soon their face and arms are covered with open sores that can get infected.
You are getting bombarded with messages about drugs in songs and movies. A study of popular music found that about

1 in 3 songs said something about drug, alcohol, or tobacco use.

3 in 4 rap songs said something about drug, alcohol, or tobacco use.

And of the top 100 movies over a 9-year period, more than

7 in 10 movies showed characters smoking.

1 in 3 movies showed people getting drunk.

Get the facts, and make your own decisions.

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Tobacco

Wrinkles, bad breath, yellow teeth, wheezing, stinky clothes?...Let me at those cigarettes!

ADDICTION
SKIN DAMAGE
CATARACTS
WRINKLES
MOUTH CANCERS
THROAT CANCER
HEART DISEASE
LUNG DISEASE
What are Prescription Opioids?

Prescription opioids, such as Vicodin® and OxyContin®, are medications that relieve pain. When taken as prescribed, they can be very effective in helping people with severe pain, such as a bad injury or pain after surgery. But they come from the same class of drugs as heroin and can be dangerous if used to get high.

FACT

More people die from prescription opioid overdoses than from heroin and cocaine combined.
A lot of you have asked: how can prescription (RX) drugs be harmful when they’re prescribed by doctors? Prescription drugs aren’t bad—they help a lot of people. It really depends on the who, how, why, and what of it.

- Who were they prescribed for (you or someone else)?
- How are you taking them (as prescribed or not)?
- Why (to get well or to get high)?
- What else are you taking (mixing with alcohol or other drugs can be dangerous)?

Some teens abuse stimulants thinking it will improve their grades, but research tells us it may do just the opposite!
ANYONE CAN OVERDOSE ON PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS OR HEROIN.

DID YOU KNOW?

If a person overdoses, they could stop breathing and die. Naloxone is a drug that quickly reverses the effects of an overdose. If you see someone overdose, call 911 right away.
QUIZ

It’s safe to use prescription drugs when:

A. You’ve checked out WebMD and know what you are doing
B. You’ve taken them before for another problem
C. They are prescribed for you by a doctor for a current problem
D. Your mom gave them to you from her prescription
E. All of the above

DID YOU KNOW?

Mixing pills with other drugs or with alcohol really increases your risk of death from accidental overdose.

Abuse of prescription ADHD medications like Adderall® and Ritalin® can cause serious health problems, including panic attacks, seizures, and heart attacks.
You know they make you fuzzy, but what do drugs do to your brain?

Different drugs do different things. But they all affect the brain—that’s why drugs make you feel high, low, speeded up, or slowed down, or see things that aren’t there.

DID YOU KNOW? Repeated drug use can reset the brain’s pleasure meter, so that without the drug, you feel hopeless and sad. Eventually, everyday fun stuff like spending time with friends or playing with your dog doesn’t make you happy anymore.
Justin always thought that if he “huffs” markers in small doses, just every once in a while, it will cause little or no damage to his brain cells. Maybe, maybe not. We’re all different, so you never know when something dangerous will happen to you. Huffing may make you high for a few minutes, but it can damage your brain for a whole lot longer.
DRUGS MESS WITH YOUR BRAIN’S WIRING AND SIGNALS.
QUIZ

Most drugs of abuse target the brain’s reward system by flooding it with:

A. Serotonin
B. Blood
C. Dopamine
D. Acetylcholine

True or False: All it takes to stop using drugs is willpower.

True
False

Which of the following affects someone’s risk of getting addicted?

A. Genes (traits in your body passed from parent to child)
B. Life at home
C. Friends’ drug use
D. All of the above

Dopamine is a chemical present in regions of the brain that control movement, emotion, motivation, and feelings of pleasure. False. While the initial decision to take drugs is typically voluntary, with continued use, the brain changes and it becomes harder and harder for a person to control drug use. All of the above.
Does treatment really work? Why do people come and go so much?

It takes time to recover from addiction— not only for the brain to re-adjust, but to make lifestyle changes to avoid drugs. Think how hard it is for people trying to lose weight—they try different diets, exercise for a while, lose a few pounds only to gain them back...until they can make lasting changes to keep the weight off. Same with quitting drugs—it may take several rounds of treatment before it sticks.
There are different types of treatments to meet your specific needs. You can get referrals to treatment programs by calling 1-800-662-HELP (a confidential hotline), or by visiting the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration online at findtreatment.samhsa.gov.
THERE IS TREATMENT AND IT WORKS.
A person who is addicted to drugs...

- A. Is beyond reach
- B. Can be helped with treatment
- C. Needs a brain transplant
- D. Can easily quit if they want to

ANSWERS:

B. Can be helped with treatment
What do YOU think?

We know you have a lot of questions about drugs. We do too, and we’d love to hear from you! So go to our blog at teens.drugabuse.gov/blog and let us know what you think—and thanks for sharing!

We also have National Drug & Alcohol Facts Week™ (NDAFW) each year that helps teens SHATTER THE MYTHS™ about drugs and drug abuse. NDAFW includes local school and community events and DRUGS & ALCOHOL CHAT DAY, a live, online chat held between high school students and NIDA scientists. Go to teens.drugabuse.gov/national-drug-facts-week to learn about events in your area. If you have a question about drugs that you haven’t seen answered anywhere else, you might be able to find it in the chat day transcript (you can find the link on the NDAFW website above).

Here are some popular questions we’ve answered:

- How many young people are addicted to drugs?
- What’s the most commonly used drug by teens?
- Can drugs make you mentally ill?
- What drug is the most addictive?
- Is smoking marijuana more harmful than smoking cigarettes?