

General Information About Drugs

Dear Dr. DQ,

If drugs are bad for people, how come some drugs are sold in stores?

Signed, Don't Understand

Dear Don't Understand,

Not all drugs are bad. Stores sell many kinds of **LEGAL** drugs. Medicines, for example, are legal drugs made to help people stay well, get well, or treat symptoms of illness. They come in two types: Prescription (Rx) and Over-The-Counter (OTC).



Even though these drugs are meant to be helpful, not following the directions and taking them the wrong way can cause **BIG** problems!! In fact, sometimes people have allergic reactions even when they do everything right !!

Stores also sell everyday household items that are fine when used as directed. The problem is, some people use them in ways they were never intended...sometimes with disastrous or even deadly results.

Signed, Dr. DQ



P.S. The other kind of drugs we need to be concerned about are the ones **NOT** sold in stores. These are obtained from drug dealers or "friends" and are called "Street Drugs." All of these are **ILLEGAL**.....and also potentially dangerous.



Exactly what IS a drug?

A drug is a chemical substance that changes how the body and mind work. Drugs can help the body fight disease (example: penicillin), maintain health (example: vitamins), prevent disease (example: calcium to prevent bone disease), and relieve pain (example: aspirin). Mood-altering drugs affect feelings by changing messages sent to the brain. These types of drugs are the ones most often abused.

Kinds of Mood-Altering Drugs

Depressants (“Downers”)



These drugs slow down or interrupt messages to and from the brain. Alcohol, barbiturates (sleeping pills), opiates, inhalants, and tranquilizers are all “downers.”

Stimulants (“Uppers”)



These drugs speed up messages to and from the brain. Examples include nicotine (in tobacco), amphetamines (pep pills), crack and cocaine, caffeine (in coffee, tea, energy drinks, chocolate, cola), and diet pills.

Hallucinogens



These drugs confuse messages to the brain. LSD (“acid”), PCP (“angel dust”), Ketamine (Special K), peyote, and psilocybin mushrooms are a few examples.

Cannabis



This includes marijuana, hashish, and hash oil. The drug in the cannabis sativa plant is THC (Delta 9 Tetrahydrocannabinol). This drug can act like a stimulant, a depressant, or a hallucinogen.



How are drugs made?

Drugs can be made synthetically (that means the drug is man-made, by processing chemicals in a laboratory) or organically (that means the drug comes from natural sources like plants). But just because a drug comes from a natural source doesn't mean it's safe. Poison ivy grows naturally, but who wants to get too close to that?

How Drugs Enter the Body

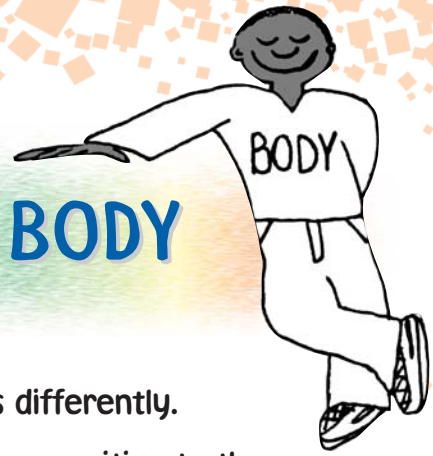
- Orally — that means through the mouth and eventually the stomach
- By being smoked or inhaled — through the nose or mouth and then into the lungs
- By being absorbed directly across body tissue — For example, nicotine in chewing tobacco enters through the cheek and gums. And cocaine that is snorted, enters through the lining of the nose.
- By being injected into the body — Needles are used to inject drugs intravenously (that means directly into the bloodstream) and intramuscularly (that means into deep muscles). “Skin-popping” refers to sticking a needle right under the skin.

FAST FACT: Drugs which are inhaled or injected affect the body almost immediately.



Since all of these ways involve putting something foreign into the body, side effects are to be expected. These can range from nausea to infections, permanent body damage, even death. In addition, any time needles are used, there's an increased risk of transmitting the HIV virus that causes AIDS.

How Drugs Affect the BODY



This depends on:

Gender Males and females process some drugs differently.

Age Young people and older people may be more sensitive to the effects of drugs and may have stronger reactions than people in their 20's, 30's, and 40's.

Body Size Small people have stronger reactions to the same amount of a drug than larger people do.

Body Chemistry Everyone is different. The same drug can cause different reactions in different people.

Physical Health People in poor physical health may suffer more from the harmful effects of drugs than people in good physical health.

Food in The Stomach When a drug is swallowed, it goes to the stomach. If there's food there, it may take a little longer for the drug to enter the body and start working.

Other Factors Such as how much is taken, how often it is taken, how strong it is, and if it has been mixed with any other drugs.

How Drugs Affect the MIND



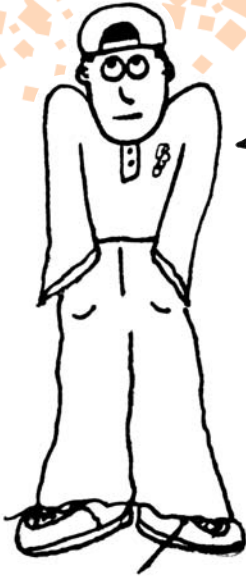
This depends on:

Expectations Sometimes people will react to a drug based on what they have been told about it by others.

Setting Where people are and who they are with when they take the drug.




Previous Experience If a drug has been taken before, a person may expect the same reaction.







Mood How people feel about themselves when they take the drug.









How can I tell if someone is having problems with drugs?

He or she will have changes in behavior which may include some or all of the following:

- Loss of interest in favorite activities or friends. 
- New friends who talk a lot about drugs. 
- Alcohol and other drugs become the focus of activities & conversations. 

- Blackouts and memory lapses. 
- Resistance towards parents and teachers. 
- Lying. 
- Increased borrowing or even stealing of money. 
- Poorer school work and lower grades. 
- When confronted, makes excuses or blames others for problems. 

- Has sudden and frequent outbursts of anger. 
- Mood swings — being happy one minute & sad the next. 
- Becomes depressed & unhappy. 
- Develops health problems like sleeplessness, or weight gain or loss. 

- Has a change in appearance — different clothes, hair, makeup, piercings, etc. 
- Ignores the concerns of others about his or her drug problems. 



How can I tell if someone has a drug ADDICTION??

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, people are considered **ADDICTED** if they experience **3 or more** of the following:

Loss of Control — over taking a drug.

At times, people who are addicted wind up using a drug even when they don't want to or weren't planning to.

Obsessive Thoughts — Addicted folks spend a LOT of time thinking about things like **HOW** they're going to get the next dose, **WHEN** they're going to get it, and **WHERE** they are going to use it.

Continued Abuse in Spite of Serious Consequences — such as getting poor grades, losing a job, or being dumped by friends.

Dependence — When a person's body is so used to a drug, it needs or craves it in order to feel good. There are 2 kinds of dependence:

- **Physical Dependence:** When the body's cells are so used to a drug that they need it in order to feel normal.
- **Psychological Dependence:** When folks believe they need a drug to feel good emotionally.

Withdrawal — Occurs when addicts suddenly stop taking the drug. Symptoms can include headaches, dizziness, vomiting, cold sweats, shakiness, anxiety, and depression. Sounds like fun...right? Wrong!



Tolerance — This occurs when body or brain cells become so used to getting a drug that the person needs to keep increasing the amount in order to get the same effects.



Increasing the amounts of a drug can lead to **OVERDOSE!** OVERDOSE means taking too much of a drug causing severe mental confusion, convulsions, coma, and sometimes even death!!



Where can people get help for a drug problem?

By looking in the **phone book** under “drug abuse,” “addiction,” or “alcoholism,” you can find the names of specific agencies or people in your area who can help. The listings may include:

Self-Help Groups:

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) — for people who are addicted to alcohol and want to stop
- Narcotics Anonymous (NA) — for people dependent on other drugs who want to stop
- Al-Anon — for family members and friends who are concerned about another person’s alcohol use
- Alateen — for kids 12 & over affected by a parent or other family member’s drinking

Others Who Can Help: Counselors at your school....as well as specifically trained physicians, clergy, psychiatrists, and psychologists.

Drug use is **SERIOUS** business. And learning to recover from an addiction can involve lots of professionals, hard work, and **TIME**.

If anyone you know shares concern about his or her own drug use, the most caring thing you can do (even if you have been sworn to secrecy) is to tell an adult you trust.

Drug Treatment Centers —

They focus on treating people with drug problems.

Hospitals — They can treat people as inpatients or outpatients.

Public Health Agencies —

They specialize in making referrals for help.

Halfway Houses —

They offer residential treatment for those with drug problems.

Mental Health Centers — They focus on the underlying problems that lead to drug addiction.

More About Drugs with Dr. DQ



Dear Dr. DQ:
What's the difference
between prescription (Rx)
and Over-the-Counter
(OTC) medicines?

Signed, Wondering

Dear Wondering,

Rx drugs need a doctor's note (a prescription) which names the patient, the drug, how much to take, and how often to take it. A patient then takes the prescription to a pharmacist who "fills" it according to the doctor's orders. **OTC** drugs include things like aspirin, vitamins, cough medicine, and nose drops. Directions for using them are printed on the packages. They can be purchased right off the store shelf.

Note: Since not all people react to drugs the same way, and some may even be allergic to them, it is always smart to check with a doctor first. Before taking **ANY** medicines, it's also important to get your parent or guardian's permission.

Signed, Dr. DQ

Dear Dr. DQ,
What is the difference
between drugs people
buy at a store and drugs
which are sold on the
street?

Signed, Unsure



Dear Unsure,

Prescriptions and OTC medications sold in stores are legal. That means they've been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The ingredients are listed on the container, and buyers know exactly what they are getting. Drugs sold "on the street" are **ILLEGAL**. In addition, "Street Drugs" are especially dangerous because they are often **NOT** what the buyer thinks. There's no way of knowing for sure how pure or strong they are...or how they will affect the user. "Street Drugs" often contain additional mood-altering chemicals... sometimes even poisons.

Signed, Dr. DQ

continued...

Questions continued...



Dear Puzzled,

There are many reasons why people use mood-altering drugs...

...to be cool, to rebel, to celebrate, to feel grown up, to relax, to escape, to forget problems, to belong to a group, to change their feelings, because of peer pressure, because they're bored, because their friends do, because they like the feeling, because they have low self-esteem, because they are addicted.

If you're unhappy or bored, it's okay to want to change your feelings. It's just that using drugs to do so is unpredictable and potentially dangerous. (Remember, no one starts out saying, "I'm going to take this so I can become an addict.")

If you're wired and stressed out, ride a bike, take a hike, talk with a friend, take a bubble bath, write a poem, or listen to your favorite music.

If you're feeling tired and bored, take a nap or a brisk shower, read an interesting book, play fast music. Best of all, try doing something nice for someone else.

If you're hurt and angry, cry, draw a picture about your feelings, talk about it with someone you trust, or do something physical, like playing the drums, jogging, or shooting hoops.

GET THE IDEA?

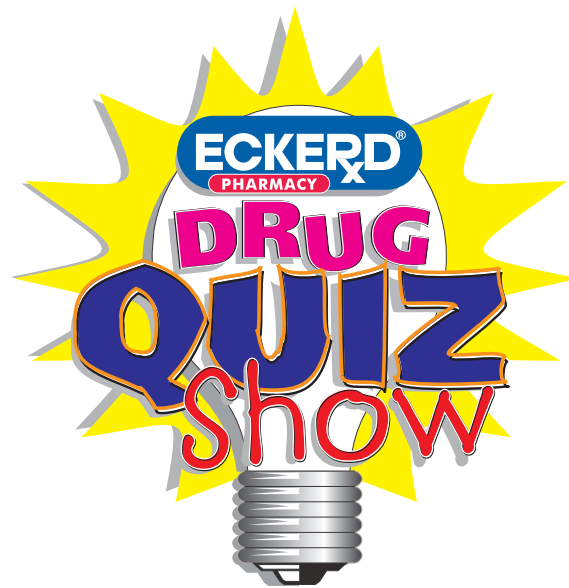
YOU are in control of how you respond to your feelings.

If you don't like them, **CHANGE THEM**.

Just make sure you do so safely, **WITHOUT** taking any drugs. Because once you decide to use drugs to do the job for you, **YOU** are no longer in control.... the drugs are !!

Signed, Dr. DQ





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