

# GENERAL QUESTIONS

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## WHAT IS A DRUG?

A drug is any chemical substance except foods that causes mental, emotional, or behavioral change in the user. Certain drugs are legal for adults (alcohol and tobacco), or are legal with a prescription. Other drugs are illegal for all ages. Drugs with psychoactive (mind altering) effects are the focus of this fact sheet series. These include depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens, and others.

## WHAT IS DRUG ABUSE?

Drug abuse is the intentional use of a legal or illegal drug (except for appropriate medical use) which results in problems or the risk of problems for the user. These may include physical, mental, emotional, legal, or social problems.

Drug misuse is the unintentional improper use of a legal drug (or drugs) which results in problems.

## HOW ARE DRUGS HARMFUL?

Any drug can cause problems. The problems differ for each drug. Some problems occur immediately, and others take time to show. Immediate health problems can include pain, nausea, overdose, and death. The immediate effects of a drug can also cause behavior which leads to accident, injury, and death. Health problems which develop over the long term can include organ damage, tolerance, dependency, increased risk of disease, and death.

Drugs can also interfere with the psychological, personal, social,

economic, and legal well-being of a user.

## WHAT DETERMINES A DRUG'S EFFECTS?

Drug effects depend on a number of factors. These include the drug taken, the amount taken, how often it is taken, the way it is taken (swallowed, injected, breathed, sniffed), and other drugs used at the same time. The user's weight, health, tolerance, and other factors also influence the effects of a drug on a person.

## WHY DO PEOPLE ABUSE DRUGS?

Drugs are abused due to their mental, emotional, and physical effects. Reasons include the wish or belief that drugs can solve problems, pressure from friends, or liking a drug's effects. Other factors that influence people's choices about drugs include easy access (especially to legal drugs like alcohol and tobacco), public acceptability, and a belief that the use is not risky or harmful.

Reasons also vary at different levels of drug use. A person may try a drug out of curiosity or social pressure. Occasional use may be because the user enjoys the effects, or because the drug is easy to obtain. Heavy use or abuse may be due to dependence and fear of withdrawal.

## WHICH DRUGS ARE ABUSED?

All drugs can be abused. Legal drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, and

prescription drugs are abused, as are illegal drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, or heroin.

## ARE SUBSTANCES OTHER THAN THOSE COMMONLY CALLED DRUGS EVER ABUSED?

Aerosol sprays, gasoline, paint thinners, household solvents, and some glues contain poisonous chemicals which can cause a "high." They can also cause physical harm and death.

These products should be sold and used with caution. Parents should keep these substances out of the reach of children.

## WHAT ARE CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES?

Controlled substances are drugs with legal restrictions to prevent or limit their use, distribution, and manufacture. They include illegal drugs and many prescription depressants, stimulants, and narcotics for medical use.

Drugs are placed into five Controlled Substance schedules (categories), based on their risk for abuse and their medical uses.

Michigan laws on controlled substances are described in the Michigan Law Fact Sheet in this series.

The use, sale, and manufacture of drugs such as alcohol and tobacco are also controlled by many laws and regulations, but they are not considered "controlled substances."

## **DO DRUG ABUSERS EVER TAKE MORE THAN ONE DRUG?**

People who abuse one drug often abuse others. This adds to the risk of health and other problems. Mixing one drug with another can greatly increase the effects.

## **WHAT IS TOLERANCE?**

Tolerance occurs when a drug user requires larger amounts of the drug to produce the same effect. Tolerance generally occurs along with physical dependence.

## **WHAT IS DRUG ADDICTION?**

The term "drug addiction" describes physical dependence on a drug. It is gradually being replaced with the term "drug dependence."

## **WHAT IS DRUG DEPENDENCE?**

Drug dependence is the need for a drug which results from the use of that drug. This need includes both mental and physical changes. Dependence makes it difficult for the user to control when they use the drug or how much they will take.

Psychological dependence occurs when the user needs the drug to feel good, or normal, or to function.

Physical dependence occurs when the body adapts to the drug and needs more of it to achieve the same effect or to function.

Withdrawal symptoms often occur when a physically dependent user stops taking the drug. Symptoms vary depending on the drug. They can include irritability, vomiting, tremors, sweating, insomnia, and convulsions. Withdrawal symptoms for alcohol, cocaine, barbiturates, narcotics, and tobacco are very difficult. A dependent user often continues to use the drug just to avoid withdrawal.

Both psychological and physical dependence are serious, and in most cases, both are present. Use

of any drug produces some degree of dependence, which interferes with that person's life.

## **WHAT IS ALCOHOLISM?**

Alcoholism is dependence on the drug alcohol. It is the drug dependence which affects the greatest number of people. Alcoholism has its "own" descriptive name because it was the first drug dependency to be observed, and because alcohol was not commonly considered a drug at one time.

## **DO MOST DRUG USERS BECOME DRUG DEPENDENT?**

The risk of dependence varies from one drug to another. It develops very rapidly for some drugs — heroin, tobacco, and cocaine, for instance. The risk is greater when a person uses more of the drug, or uses it more often. Some people become dependent more quickly than others. Most people who try a drug do not become dependent or even become regular users.

Dependency is only one of the many risks of drug abuse. Even those who do not become dependent may still be harmed by drug use, or may harm others.

## **WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF OCCASIONAL DRUG USE?**

Even occasional use of many drugs may result in health problems, even death. Occasional use can be excessive, result in overdose, and cause drinking and driving crashes, arguments, violence, injuries, and other problems.

## **HOW DO DRUGS AFFECT SEXUAL RESPONSE?**

This varies from drug to drug, but some things are true overall. No drug acts as a true aphrodisiac (capable of creating sexual desire), despite common beliefs. Heavy use

of many drugs, (narcotics, cocaine, and alcohol for instance) often reduce sexual response.

## **IS IT RISKY TO USE DRUGS DURING PREGNANCY?**

Any drug taken by the pregnant woman can affect the fetus. Even low doses may have an effect. Alcohol, tobacco, aspirin or other over the counter drugs, some prescription drugs, and illegal drugs can all harm the developing fetus, sometimes causing birth defects, low birth weight, or death. Babies born to mothers who used drugs during pregnancy are often born drug dependent, requiring special care after birth.

A woman who is pregnant, considering pregnancy, or breastfeeding should not use alcohol, tobacco, or any other drug without the approval of her physician.

## **WHAT IS A DRUG OVERDOSE, AND WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?**

An overdose of drugs is any amount which produces an acute and dangerous reaction. A fatal overdose is one which causes death. Fatal overdose is possible with alcohol, barbiturates, narcotics, stimulants, and inhalants.

Overdose varies from drug to drug. Effects can include panic, bizarre behavior, severely slow breathing, stupor, unconsciousness, seizures, coma, or heart spasm. Get medical help immediately! Try to determine what drug(s) were taken. Save samples and containers for analysis if possible.

Certain drugs (in particular hallucinogens, PCP, marijuana, or stimulants) sometimes produce an overdose called a panic reaction. The user may become frightened, suspicious, or fear harm from others. In such cases, stay calm, reassure the user that these feelings are caused by the drug and will subside, and get help from a community hotline, drug crisis center, or hospital emergency room.

## **CAN OVER-THE-COUNTER (NON-PRESCRIPTION) DRUGS BE DANGEROUS?**

Non-prescription drugs include products such as antihistamines, aspirin, cough medicines, diet pills, sleeping aids, and alertness products. Some of these over-the-counter drugs contain alcohol, codeine, or stimulants. If these drugs are not used properly, they can cause serious problems.

Over-the-counter drugs can cause allergic reactions in some people. They can also cause dangerous interactions with any other drugs in the user's system, particularly alcohol. Dosage and warning labels should be followed with care. Overdoses of many over-the-counter drugs can cause health damage and even death.

Pregnant women should ask their physician before using any over-the-counter drug.

## **HOW CAN MISUSE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS BE CONTROLLED?**

Everyone should be taught that

medication should be used only as prescribed. Medicine should never be shared with others. Old prescription medicine should be destroyed. All drugs should be kept away from children. Doctors and pharmacists should watch for signs of misuse. Michigan monitors certain prescription drugs to detect likely misuse and abuse.

## **WHAT KIND OF TREATMENT IS AVAILABLE FOR THE DRUG ABUSER?**

There are many kinds of treatment programs. No single approach seems to succeed for all people and for all drugs. Outpatient counseling, residential treatment, and hospital inpatient treatment are all forms of treatment.

Treatment may include use of therapeutic drugs, or it may be drug-free. Group or individual counseling is common. Family involvement is often part of a program. Rehabilitation services for career and job skills may be included.

Support from a self-help group such as Alcoholics or Narcotics

Anonymous and an aftercare plan are important parts of most programs.

People are often referred to treatment by employers, schools, family, or the legal system. Information and advice about treatment are available from regional coordinating agencies, telephone hotlines, and treatment services themselves.

## **CAN A PERSON GET HELP FOR DRUG PROBLEMS WITHOUT GETTING INTO TROUBLE WITH THE LAW?**

Regulations protect the confidentiality of patients in treatment. A treatment service will explain these rules to each person getting treatment.

For further information on specific drugs, ask for other titles in this fact sheet series. Contact the Michigan Resource Center.

## **REGIONAL COORDINATING AGENCIES:**

There are 15 regional coordinating agencies in Michigan which coordinate local substance abuse services from prevention to assessment, referral, treatment, and aftercare. Each coordinating agency has a prevention specialist who can identify local resources, offer technical assistance, and help network with other prevention activities in the region.

### **Detroit Health Department**

Bureau of Substance Abuse, Herman Kiefer Health Complex, Bldg. 1, Room 212-B  
1151 Taylor, Detroit, MI 48202  
313/876-4566  
Serving: City of Detroit (Wayne County)

### **Eastern Upper Peninsula Substance Abuse Services**

1500 West Washington Street, Marquette, MI 49855  
906/228-2572  
Serving: Alger, Chippewa, Delta, Luce, Mackinac, Marquette, Menominee, Schoolcraft counties

### **Genesee County Health Department**

Floyd J. McCree Courts & Human Services Bldg.  
630 South Saginaw Street, Flint, MI 48502-1540  
810/257-3201  
Serving: Genesee County

### **Kalamazoo County Human Services Department**

Regional Coordinating Agency, Nazareth Complex,  
3299 Gull Road, P.O. Box 42, Nazareth, MI 49074-0042  
616/373-5209  
Serving: Barry, Branch, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph counties

### **Lakeshore Coordinating Council**

324 Washington, P.O. Box 268,  
Grand Haven, MI 49417-0268  
616/846-6720  
Serving: Allegan, Berrien, Cass, Muskegon, Ottawa, Van Buren counties

### **Macomb County Community Mental Health**

Office of Substance Abuse Services, Macomb County Building,  
6th Floor, 10 N. Main Street, Mt. Clemens, MI 48043  
810/469-5278 or 810/469-5920  
Serving: Macomb County

**Mid-South Substance Abuse Commission**

Northwind Office Park, 2875 Northwind Drive, Suite 105  
East Lansing, MI 48823  
517/337-4406

Serving: Calhoun, Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Hillsdale,  
Ingham, Jackson, Lenawee, Shiawassee counties

**Mink Substance Abuse Coordinating Agency**

Kent County Health Department, 700 Fuller NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

616/336-3031 and 336-3079

Serving: Ionia, Kent, Montcalm, Newaygo counties

**Northern Michigan Substance Abuse Services, Inc.**

1665 W. M-32, Marquette Building, P.O. Box 1278,  
Gaylord, MI 49734

517/732-1791

Serving: Alcona, Arenac, Alpena, Antrim, Benzie,  
Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Clare, Crawford, Emmet,  
Gladwin, Grand Traverse, Isabella, Iosco, Kalkaska,  
Lake, Leelanau, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Midland,  
Missaukee, Montmorency, Oceana, Ogemaw, Osceola,  
Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle, Roscommon,  
Wexford counties

**Oakland County Health Division**

Office of Substance Abuse

250 Elizabeth Lake Rd., Suite 1550

Pontiac, MI 48341-1050

248/858-0001

Serving: Oakland County

**Saginaw County Health Department**

1600 N. Michigan Avenue, Saginaw, MI 48602-5395  
517/758-3745

Serving: Bay, Saginaw counties

**St. Clair County Health Department**

Thumb Region Substance Abuse Services  
Coordinating Agency

3415 - 8th Street, Port Huron, MI 48060

810/987-8922

Serving: Huron, Lapeer, Sanilac, St. Clair,  
Tuscola counties

**Southeast Michigan Community Alliance**

8750 S. Telegraph, Suite 400, Taylor, MI 48180

313/295-1200

Serving: Monroe & Wayne counties (less City of Detroit)

**Washtenaw County Community Mental  
Health Center**

Livinston-Washtenaw Substance Abuse  
Coordinating Agency

555 Towner Street, P.O. Box 915, Ypsilanti, MI 48197

734/484-6620

Serving: Livingston, Washtenaw counties

**Western Upper Peninsula Substance Abuse  
Services Coordinating Agency**

323 Quincy, Hancock, MI 49930

906/482-7710

Serving: Baraga, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron,  
Keweenaw, Ontonagon counties

**MICHIGAN RESOURCE CENTER**

For Alcohol, Tobacco & Other Drug Information,  
Health Promotion, and Traffic Safety Education Materials  
111 W. Edgewood Blvd., Ste. 11 • Lansing, MI 48911  
(517) 882-9955

MATERIALS INFO. 800-626-4636 • FAX (517) 882-7778

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Website: [www.wearemrc.org](http://www.wearemrc.org)

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