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## Taking Drugs

Drugs, from the Old French *drogue*, are everywhere. They're either man-made chemicals or natural substances that change the way your body works. Once in your body, a drug gets absorbed into your bloodstream. From there, depending on the drug, it can kill bacteria, intensify or dull your senses, put you to sleep, wake you up, and make pain disappear.

There are *therapeutic* drugs, like antibiotics and vaccines, which help people by lowering blood pressure, treating diabetes, curing infections, and preventing disease. Therapeutic drugs are legal, meaning doctors prescribe them for patients, stores sell them, and people buy them at a drug store. It's neither legal nor safe to use therapeutic drugs differently than instructed by a doctor.

Tobacco (Smoking) and alcohol (Drinking) are two other kinds of legal drugs. In the United States, adults 18 and over can buy tobacco products, like cigarettes, and those 21 and over can buy alcohol. Even though it's legal, smoking and excessive drinking aren't healthy.

There are also *recreational* drugs that people use to feel good and have a good time. People start using recreational drugs for the excitement and temporary escape they seem to offer. When people talk about the "drug problem," they usually mean recreational drugs. And that means 1) taking high doses of therapeutic drugs that weren't prescribed by a doctor, 2) using illegal drugs, like ecstasy, cocaine, LSD, or heroin, or 3) using some other substance as a drug, like sniffing glue.

### Short-List of Recreational Drugs to Avoid

1. *Inhalants* are substances that are breathed directly into the user's nose, like glue, paint thinner, dry cleaning fluid, gasoline, felt-tip marker fluid, correction fluid, hair spray, aerosol deodorant, and spray paint that are sniffed. Long-time users get headaches,

- nosebleeds, and suffer loss of hearing and sense of smell. Inhalants are the most likely of abused substances to cause severe toxic reaction and death. Inhalants are psychologically addictive.
2. *Marijuana*, made from the leaves of the cannabis plant, is the most widely used drug in the United States. Marijuana is generally considered an illegal recreational drug, but some states allow doctors to prescribe it for certain illnesses. Marijuana elevates heart rate and blood pressure, and makes some people paranoid or causes them to hallucinate. When smoked, marijuana is as tough on the lungs as tobacco and users suffer coughs, wheezing, and frequent colds. Marijuana is psychologically addictive.
  3. *Amphetamines*, like prescription diet pills, are stimulants that accelerate brain and body functions. Users suffer from sweating, shaking, headaches, sleeplessness, blurred vision, hallucinations, and paranoia. Amphetamines are psychologically addictive.
  4. *DXM* is made from over-the-counter cough and cold medicines. Taken in large enough doses, it causes hallucinations, fever, blurred vision, paranoia, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, loss of consciousness, seizures, brain damage, and death. DXM is psychologically addictive.
  5. *Depressants*, like Valium and Xanax, are used by doctors to calm nerves and relax muscles. Taken in large enough doses, depressants cause confusion, slurred speech, tremors, irregular breathing, and death. Depressants are psychologically and physically addictive.
  6. *Ketamine* is an anesthetic that is legally used in humans (as a sedative for minor surgery) and animals (as a tranquilizer). Taken at high enough doses, it causes nausea, vomiting, memory loss, numbness, slowed breathing, and death. Ketamine is psychologically addictive.
  7. *Cocaine* is a stimulant made from dried coca plant leaves that affects the central nervous system. It elevates heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, and body temperature. Cocaine is highly addictive with strong physical and psychological cravings after just one use.
  8. *Crack*, named for its crackle when heated, is made from cocaine. First-time crack users can stop breathing or have heart attacks. Like cocaine, crack is highly addictive.

9. *Ecstasy* is a recreational drug illegally made just for the drug trade. Users suffer from cramps, blurred vision, chills, sweating, nausea, depression, paranoia, organ damage, and sometimes death. Ecstasy is psychologically addictive.
10. *Methamphetamine* is a recreational drug illegally made for the drug trade. Users suffer sleeplessness, paranoia, hallucinations, aggression, psychosis, and brain damage. Methamphetamine is highly addictive.

#### Drug Dos and Don'ts

- Be smart.
- Don't do drugs.

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