

Drug facts



Centre for Addiction Research & Education
(A division of DRUG ARM Australasia)

Cannabis

Cannabis is the most common illegal drug used in Australia. THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) is the chemical that affects people when they smoke cannabis. It usually makes people feel relaxed and talkative, however, it can also make a person feel anxious or depressed. The effects can last from 20 minutes to many hours.

Short-term effects: Even though cannabis affects people in different ways, the most common reactions are: paranoia, vomiting, loss of concentration and coordination, panic, confusion, increased appetite, reddened eyes and hallucinations.

Long-term effects: The long-term effects of cannabis use can be very serious. Some effects are: respiratory diseases, lung cancer, loss of interest and energy, lack of concentration, memory loss, learning difficulties, decreased sex drive, lowered sperm count, irregular menstrual cycle and severe psychotic behaviour.

The law: Using, growing, selling or possessing cannabis is illegal in Australia. Each state or territory has different laws regarding penalties and criminal conviction.

Amphetamines

Commonly known as speed, amphetamines are a group of drugs that are made from a mixture of dangerous chemicals. Often they are made in illegal backyard labs.

Short-term effects: The effects of speed usually depend on how much of the drug is taken. Low doses can cause sleeplessness, high blood pressure, dilated pupils, shakes, restlessness and sweating. High doses of the drug can cause irregular heartbeat, dizziness and fainting, confusion, paranoia, fever, stomach cramps, loss of coordination, fits, blurred vision and headaches.

Long-term effects: Regular use of speed can cause heart attacks, hostility, malnutrition, addiction, aggressiveness, hallucinations and overdose.

The law: Using, making, selling or possessing speed is illegal in Australia.

Heroin

Heroin belongs to the group of drugs called opioids or narcotic analgesics. These drugs are strong painkillers and are used to treat chronic pain or illnesses such as cancer. Heroin is usually sold as a white powder, which can be swallowed, injected, sniffed or smoked ('chasing').

Short-term effects: The effects of heroin depend on the amount and purity and the way in which it is taken. The immediate effects can include: feelings of well-being, relief of pain, constipation, narrowing of the pupils, sleepiness, nausea and vomiting, shallow breathing, unconsciousness and death. The effects can last between two and 24 hours.

Long-term effects: Heroin can cause serious health problems if used over a long period of time. These include: Hepatitis B and C, heart, chest and bronchial problems, impotence, infertility and irregular periods, chronic constipation, tetanus and skin abscesses, tooth decay, collapsed veins, anxiety attacks and depression.

The law: Possessing, manufacturing or selling heroin is illegal in Australia.

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Ecstasy

Ecstasy is the common term for MDMA (MethyleneDioxyMethAmphetamine). The chemical structure of ecstasy is similar to amphetamines (speed) and some hallucinogens. Ecstasy is usually sold as small tablets.

Short-term effects: The effects of ecstasy can start within an hour of taking the drug and can last up to 32 hours. The effects include: increased blood pressure and pulse rate, increased body temperature, increased confidence, feelings of closeness with other people, sweating, dehydration, jaw clenching, grinding teeth, strong feeling of well-being, nausea, anxiety and paranoid thoughts.

Long-term effects: Little is known about the long-term effects of ecstasy use. However, there is some evidence to suggest that long-term use can cause brain, heart and liver damage.

The law: Use, possession or supply of ecstasy is illegal in Australia.

Cocaine

Cocaine is made from the leaves of the coca plant. It is a stimulant, which speeds up the central nervous system and the brain.

Short-term effects: The effects include: reduced appetite, increased heart rate, agitation, sexual arousal, increased body temperature, enlarged pupils, increased alertness and energy, feeling of well-being, inability to judge risks, unpredictable and aggressive behaviour.

Long-term effects: The effects can include: restlessness, increased excitability, nausea, insomnia, weight loss, muscle twitching, heart pain, hallucinations, violent or aggressive behaviour, loss of interest in sex, headaches, loss of ambition and motivation.

The law: Using, keeping, selling or giving cocaine to someone else is illegal in Australia.

References

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