

Health Risks of Drugs and Alcohol

❖ **ALCOHOL** consumption causes physical and emotional changes that can do great harm to your body. The long-term effects of alcohol abuse are many with some of the effects listed below:

- ✓ **Excretory System** (*excretory system processes and eliminates waste from your body*). Excessive alcohol use can cause pancreatitis, hepatitis, jaundice, cirrhosis, hypoglycemia, and liver cancer.
- ✓ **Central Nervous System** (*central nervous system integrates information it receives from and coordinates and influences the activity of all parts of the body*). Alcohol use and abuse can cause changes in behavior, slurred speech, coordination issues, balance and the ability to walk. Alcohol also impacts the ability to think clearly, control impulses, form memories and can cause dementia, brain damage, pain, numbness, abnormal sensations in hand and feet, thiamine deficiency, and paralysis of the eye muscles.

FACT FINDER: *The effects of alcohol withdrawal on the central nervous system may include nausea, anxiety, nervousness, tremors, confusion, hallucinations and seizures. Abrupt stoppage of alcohol can cause death.*

- ✓ **Digestive System** (*organs working together to convert food into energy and basic nutrients to feed the entire body*). Alcohol abuse can damage the salivary glands, cause tooth decay and loss, as well as ulcers in the esophagus and stomach, acid reflux, heartburn and gastritis. Alcoholics often suffer from malnutrition and face higher risk of mouth, throat, and esophagus cancers, upper-gastrointestinal cancers, colon cancer, nausea and vomiting.
- ✓ **Circulatory System** (*permits blood to circulate and transport nutrients to cells in the body to provide nourishment, help in fighting diseases, stabilize temperature and pH, and maintain balance*). Circulatory system complications include: poisoning of the heart muscle cells (cardiomyopathy), irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia), high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack, and heart failure.
- ✓ **Sexual and Reproductive Health** - Erectile dysfunction is a common side effect of alcohol abuse in men. It can also inhibit hormone production, affect testicular function, and cause infertility. Excessive drinking can cause an increased risk of breast cancer, interrupt and stop menstruation, infertility, as well as increase the risk of miscarriage, premature delivery, and stillbirth.
- ✓ **Skeletal and Muscle Systems** - Long-term alcohol use makes it harder for your body to produce new bone. Drinking puts you at an increased risk of osteoporosis (thinning bones) and bone fractures. Muscles become prone to weakness, cramps, and even atrophy.
- ✓ **Immune System** - An immune system weakened by alcohol abuse has a hard time fighting off viruses, germs, and all types of illness. Heavy drinkers are more likely to get pneumonia or tuberculosis than the general population. Chronic alcohol use increases your risk of many forms of cancer.

Substances

❖ MARIJUANA

The effects of marijuana on the body are immediate with impacts on multiple body systems including: excretory, central nervous, digestive, circulatory, reproductive, skeletal, muscle, and immune systems. Marijuana use causes an increased risk of bronchitis, lung infections, lung cancer and aggravates illness like asthma and cystic fibrosis. Other effects include: feelings of panic, anxiety and fear (paranoia), hallucinations, increased heart rate, trouble concentrating, decreased ability to perform tasks that require coordination, and decreased interest in completing tasks. When coming down from the high, users may feel depressed, extremely tired, heightened agitation, anxiety, insomnia and irritability.

❖ ECSTASY (MDMA)

The effects of **ecstasy** on the body typically take effect within an hour and last several hours and include: nausea, chills, sweating, involuntary jaw clenching and teeth grinding, muscle cramping, blurred vision, marked rise in body temperature, dehydration, high blood pressure, heart failure, kidney failure, and arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat). Effects occurring up to one week post usage include: anxiety, restlessness, irritability, sadness, impulsiveness, aggression, sleep disturbances, lack of appetite, thirst, reduced interest in and pleasure from sex, and significant reductions in mental abilities.

❖ COCAINE

Cocaine is highly addictive. Depending on whether it is smoked, snorted or injected, cocaine can be quite rapidly acting and directly impacts the release of dopamine in the brain. Short-term effects of cocaine use include restlessness, irritability and anxiety, panic, and paranoia. Cocaine use can lead to a heart attack, **erratic and possibly violent behavior**, tremors, muscle twitches or tics, paranoia, vertigo, constricted blood vessels, dilated pupils, increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, increased body temperature, and decreased sexual function.

❖ HEROIN

Heroin is highly addictive. Short-term heroin use can cause nausea, vomiting, grogginess, confusion, dry mouth, itchy skin, miotic or constricted pupils, light sensitivity, lower than normal body temperature, slowed respiration, slowed heart rate, and cyanotic (bluish) hands, feet, lips. Dangerously slow breathing, lack of oxygen to the brain, heart problems, coma, and death are also possible. Long-term heroin use may cause decreased dental health marked by damaged teeth and gum swelling, excoriated skin from scratching, severe constipation, increased susceptibility to disease from the diminished immune system, weakness and sedation, poor appetite and malnutrition, sleeping problems, and decrease in sexual functioning.

❖ PCP/LSD/MUSHROOMS (HALLUCINOGENS)

Hallucinogens work by temporarily interfering with the neurotransmitters or receptor sites responsible for the production of serotonin and other chemicals within the brain. Effects can last for weeks or years after ingestion. The effects of hallucinogenic drugs vary depending on what drug is taken. However, they can cause delusional thoughts, hallucinations, and disconnection from reality, sensory overload, terrifying thoughts, feelings of despair or regret, extreme depression, panic, psychosis, impaired memory and permanent psychiatric illness. Weight loss, raised body temperature, sleeplessness or insomnia, sweating and loss of nutrients, tremors, poisoning, nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS (OPIATES/STIMULANTS/TRANQUILIZERS)

FACT FINDER: *Prescription drug abuse, like many other drugs effects nearly all systems within the body.*

❖ OPIATES (Examples: Codeine, Vicodin, Hydrocodone, morphine, OxyContin, Percocet)

Abuse of opiates and painkillers may be equally distinguishable by the withdrawal symptoms a user experiences when they attempt to stop using the drugs. These symptoms indicate the potential for serious medical complications and should be taken very seriously: cold flashes, regardless of environment, involuntary leg movements (“kicking”), restlessness, sharp bone and muscle pains, vomiting, diarrhea, cardiac arrest, seizures, and shortness of breath.

❖ **STIMULANTS** *(Examples: Adderall, Ritalin)*

Abuse of stimulants may affect the body in the following ways: extreme agitation or irritability, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, elevated body temperatures, seizures, cardiovascular failure, increasing hostility, feelings of paranoia, insomnia, and unexplained weight loss.

❖ **TRANQUILIZERS** *(Examples: Xanax, Ativan)*

Abuse of tranquilizers may affect the body in the following ways: drowsy or intoxicated appearance, confusion about surroundings or time, unsteady movements and/or mannerisms, involuntary gestures, movements or tics, rapid, involuntary eye movement, poor judgment and decision-making, and difficulty with memory

❖ **STEROIDS**

Short-term effects of steroid use include acne, mood swings, fatigue, restlessness/ agitation, decreased appetite, trouble sleeping, decreased sperm count, and impotence. Since anabolic steroids are synthetic forms of testosterone, they will influence many of the characteristics of gender in the person abusing the substance including shrinking of the testicles, excessive hair growth and deepening of the voice in women, growth of breast tissue in men, fertility issues, heart problems, elevated blood pressure, rapid mood swings, mania, stroke, and menstrual irregularities for women.

❖ **SLEEPING PILLS** *(Examples: Lunesta, Sonata, Ambien, Rozerem, Halcion)*

Common side effects of prescription sleeping pills include burning or tingling in the hands, arms, feet, or legs, changes in appetite, constipation, diarrhea, difficulty keeping balance, dizziness, daytime drowsiness, dry mouth or throat, headache, heartburn, mental slowing or problems with attention or memory, stomach or tenderness, uncontrollable shaking of a part of the body, unusual dreams, and over-all weakness.