

Drugs. *There are answers.* 

How do I talk
to someone
about drugs?
What are
the facts?
Where do I go
for help?

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Introduction: The National Drugs Strategy

The Irish Government has created a plan to tackle the problems caused by drug use. This plan is called "The National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008: Building on Experience."

This strategy was created with the help of the many different organisations and groups working to solve the problem in Ireland today.

The overall aim of the strategy is "*to significantly reduce the harm caused to individuals and society by the misuse of drugs through a concerted focus on supply reduction, prevention, treatment and research.*"

The drugs problem is a complex one which needs many different answers. The Government recognises this and the strategy sets out to tackle the problem in four major ways:

- Reducing the supply of illegal drugs;
- Trying to prevent the development of drug problems through education, information and awareness about the dangers of drug misuse;
- Creating better treatment, support and rehabilitation services for people already involved with drugs;
- Researching drug use in Ireland so we can understand the problems better.

There is a lot of misinformation about drugs. It is important that everyone has the right information so they can make better choices and decisions.

It is also important that everyone understands that this is not a problem they have to handle alone. There is help available no matter what the scale of the problem.



To make better choices you need the right information.

Drug use is a complex issue that affects everybody in Ireland today.

A recent Health Research Board survey showed that *three out of every four Irish people don't have enough information, or have the wrong information, about drugs.*

- What do you know about drugs?
- What would you do if you thought someone you cared about was involved with drugs?
- What would you do if you were offered drugs?
- How would you react if you found out that a friend of your's was dealing drugs?
- If you are a parent, how would you react if you found something that you thought was drugs in your child's clothes?

The right information can help you make better choices and decisions. It also makes it easier to talk about drugs in an open and informed way.

This booklet looks at some common myths about drug use. It also recommends the places to look for more information and who to contact for support or help.

DRUGS

What do we mean when we talk about drug use?

People in Ireland today use many different kinds of drugs. These drugs may be legal or illegal, helpful or harmful. Every drug has side-effects and risks, but some drugs have more risks than others, especially illegal drugs.

Problem drug use results from a combination of factors. These are:

- **WHAT** drug is being used;
- **WHO** is using the drug (especially the mood and personality of the individual), and **WHY** they are using the drug;
- **WHERE** and **HOW** they are using the drug.

To begin to understand the problems you have to know what drug is involved and what is happening in the life of the person who is using the drug. **Different drugs create different problems for different people.** These problems need different answers.

In this leaflet we look mainly at the problem of illegal drug use. The most commonly used illegal drugs in Ireland today are cannabis, ecstasy, heroin and cocaine. Information about these and other drugs is contained in this booklet.

Further information is also available on the website www.druginfo.ie.

Why do people use drugs?

Different people use different drugs for different reasons.

There are of course 'legal drugs' which we all come across everyday. For example, some people take medicine when they are sick, alcohol to help them relax or coffee to help them stay awake. What we are talking about in this booklet are 'illegal drugs'.

Typical reasons why people may experiment with illegal drugs include curiosity, peer influence, or a desire to escape boredom or worries. People also take certain drugs to change how they feel. They may believe it's a fun or fashionable thing to do.

People may continue to use a drug because they enjoy it, or because it's part of their social life or culture. This is often called 'recreational' drug use.

Sometimes because of ongoing emotional or psychological problems, or because of social factors, drug use can become an important part of a person's life.

The use of some drugs can lead to dependency, where a person loses control over their drug use and feels they cannot function without the drug.





Myths & Misconceptions

There are no easy answers to the problems caused by drug use, but having the right information can help. The facts are important in helping you deal with drugs issues.

"Aren't all drugs addictive?"

Some drugs can create addiction or dependence much quicker than others. However there is no evidence confirming people get 'hooked' after one or two experiences, or that everyone who tries a drug will become addicted (although using a drug even once can have serious consequences). The **what, who, why, where** and **how** of drug use are important in the development of dependency.

"Only drug addicts have a problem"

Addiction or dependency is not the only problem drugs can cause. Some people experience problems the first time they use a drug, or problems develop as their use becomes more frequent. Drug use can affect a person's physical and mental health, their family life, relationships, and their work or study. Using illegal drugs can also get people into trouble with the law or into financial difficulties.

"Aren't all illegal drugs equally harmful?"

Different drugs cause harm in different ways. Some drugs, such as heroin, are regarded as being more dangerous because they have a higher risk of addiction and overdose, or because they are injected. However each drug has its own risks. Drugs are often described as being either 'hard' or 'soft'. These words are not always helpful because it's not as simple as that.

"My teenager is moody and losing interest in school - they must be on drugs"

Often parents ask how they can tell if their child is using drugs. But lists of signs and symptoms need to be approached with caution. Many of the possible signs, such as mood swings or loss of interest in hobbies or study, may well have other causes. It's better to talk to them before jumping to conclusions.

"Young people are tempted to try drugs by pushers"

Most young people are introduced to illegal drugs by a friend, or someone they know. And in many cases drugs are 'pulled' rather than 'pushed', meaning the person asks for it themselves - often out of curiosity.





It's good to Talk ... and Listen!

Talking about drugs and drug use can be quite a challenge.

Some people feel uncomfortable or inadequate when talking about drugs, because they don't know enough (or think they don't) about the subject.

They may also lack confidence in their ability to talk to and influence the person.

Listen to the other person.

It's important to understand and respect how they feel.

Keep the lines of communication open and above all look for more information before you do anything.

So where can you get more information or help?

Each health board area has staff trained in drugs education. They can be contacted at the phone numbers as shown below during normal business hours; an answering service is available thereafter.

Counselling and treatment services are also available by contacting your local health board.

Contact numbers for Health Board areas:

Eastern Regional Health Authority serving Dublin city and county, Co. Kildare and Co. Wicklow (incorporates South Western Area Health Board, Northern Area Health Board and East Coast Area Health Board)
Freephone 1800 459 459 (Mon - Sun, 10am - 5pm)

Mid-Western Health Board serving Co. Clare, Limerick city and county and Co. Tipperary N.R.
Locall 1850 700 850 (Mon - Fri, 2pm - 5pm)

Midland Health Board serving Co. Laois, Co. Longford, Co. Offaly and Co. Westmeath

- Laois: 0502 64564 (Mon - Thurs, 9.30am - 5pm and Fri, 9.30am - 5.15pm)
- Longford: 043 42031 (Mon - Thurs, 9.30am - 5pm and Fri, 9.30am - 5.15pm)
- Westmeath: 0902 77108 (Mon - Thurs, 9.30am - 5pm and Fri, 9.30am - 5.15pm)
- Offaly: 0506 27445 (Mon - Thurs, 9.30am - 5pm and Fri, 9.30am - 5.15pm)



**North Eastern Health Board serving Co. Cavan, Co. Louth,
Co. Meath and Co. Monaghan**

- Drogheda, Co. Louth: 041 984 3531 (Mon - Fri, 9.30am - 5pm)
- Dundalk, Co. Louth: 042 935 7518 (Mon - Fri, 9.30am - 5pm)
- Navan, Co. Meath: 046 76400 (Mon - Fri, 9.30am - 5pm)
- Cavan/Monaghan: 047 72100
(Mon - Fri, 9.30am - 5pm and Sat - Sun, 9.30 - 7pm)

**North Western Health Board serving Co. Donegal,
Co. Leitrim and Co. Sligo**

- Locall 1850 636 313 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)
- Donegal: 074 912 8769 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)
 - Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan: 071 914 3316 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)

**South Eastern Health Board serving Co. Carlow, Co. Waterford,
Co. Wexford, Co. Kilkenny and Co. Tipperary S.R.**

- Regional Drug Helpline: 051 373333 (Tues, Thurs, 8pm - 10pm)
- Waterford: 051 301 201 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)
- Tipperary: 052 77900 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)
- Wexford: 053 23522 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)
- Kilkenny/Carlow: 056 64638/52208 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)

**Southern Health Board serving Cork city and county and
Co. Kerry**

021 496 8933 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)

**Western Health Board serving Co. Galway, Co. Mayo and
Co. Roscommon**

- Galway City: 091 561 299/375 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)
- Galway County: 095 21109 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)
- Roscommon: 0903 25395 / 079 64810 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)
- Mayo: 094 20430 / 096 60060 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)

Other useful contacts for information include your local family doctor, pharmacist, community Garda, Local Drugs Task Force or community drugs awareness groups. They may also be able to talk to you about your problem or advise you about where you should go for further help.

Further information is also available at www.drugsinfo.ie

Information on individual drugs

There are five main kinds of drugs that can change a person's mood or how they behave. Most of these types of drugs come under a law called the Misuse of Drugs Act. They are known as controlled drugs and are listed in different groups called schedules. The Schedules group drugs according to the controls required and the usefulness of the drugs. For example, Schedule One covers drugs that are considered to have no medical use and include hallucinogenic drugs and so called 'designer drugs' such as ecstasy. This is different from the situation in the UK where the various Classes (A, B, C etc.) group drugs according to the penalties they attract.

- **Depressants** such as alcohol, can be used to calm the mind, relieve anxiety and can cause sleepiness.
- **Sedatives and minor tranquillisers** include the benzodiazepine drugs, such as Valium. These are often prescribed to calm people down or to help them sleep at night. They have the same general effects as depressants but they cause addiction in a different way.
- **Opiates**, also known as narcotic analgesics, are strong painkillers that produce feelings of euphoria (happiness) and sleepiness. The opiates include morphine, heroin and methadone.
- **Stimulants** are drugs that make people feel more awake, alert, energetic and confident. Stimulant drugs include cocaine and amphetamines.
- **Hallucinogens** are drugs that produce strange and intense visions called hallucinations. These drugs include LSD (acid) and magic mushrooms.

Depressants and sedatives are sometimes called 'downers' and stimulant drugs are sometimes called 'uppers'. Many drugs don't belong to just one type. For example, cannabis can have depressant effects as well as causing euphoria, and ecstasy has both stimulant and hallucinogenic effects.

Sometimes people use more than one drug at the same time - this is known as 'polydrug use'. Mixing drugs can be dangerous because the effects and side-effects can be added together. For example, taking alcohol with another sedative or depressant drug can cause a person to become more drowsy or even unconscious.





CANNABIS

Slang names include *hash*, *blow*, *shit*, *dope*, *grass*, *weed*.

Cannabis is a natural plant and is used in three main forms. The most common type is called resin, which comes as solid dark-coloured lumps or blocks. Less common are the leaves and stalks of the plant, called 'grass' or 'weed', and the third kind, cannabis oil, is rarely seen in Ireland. Cannabis is usually rolled with tobacco into a 'joint' or 'spliff' and smoked, but it can also be cooked and eaten.

Effects - Getting 'stoned' on cannabis makes users feel relaxed, talkative and happy. Some people feel time slows down and they also report a greater appreciation of colours, sounds and tastes. Users can develop strong cravings for food, called the 'munchies'.

Side-effects - Cannabis can affect memory and concentration, and can leave people feeling tired and lacking motivation. Inexperienced users or people using a stronger type of cannabis than they are used to, can feel anxiety, panic or confusion. Some people may experience delusions or hallucinations.

Risks - Many people consider cannabis to be a relatively safe drug. But new research shows that long-term users can find it hard to control their use of the drug and may become addicted. Smoking cannabis increases the risk of heart disease and cancers such as lung cancer, and may also affect fertility. Cannabis use may trigger schizophrenia in vulnerable people. In Ireland it is the second most common drug found in the systems of 'drunk' drivers, after alcohol.

ECSTASY

Slang names include *E*, *doves*, *Mitsubishis*, *yokes*, *shamrocks*.

Ecstasy is usually produced in back-street laboratories in a number of European countries. It is sold mainly as tablets on which there are different logos or designs. Sometimes ecstasy tablets can also contain other drugs and substances.

Effects - Ecstasy users can feel more alert and in tune with their surroundings. They feel happy and calm and have a warm feeling towards other people. Sounds, colours and emotions are more intense. Users have more energy which allows them to dance for long periods of time.

Side-effects - Body temperature, blood pressure and heart-rate can rise. Other physical effects include muscle pain, nausea, jaw stiffness and teeth grinding. Some users experience severe sweating, tremors and palpitations. Users can feel dehydrated, confused and tired.

Risks - Most legal drugs are tested on animals first, but ecstasy users are human guinea pigs. Already research shows that regular weekend users experience a mid-week 'crash' that can leave them feeling tired and depressed, often for days. It could be years before we know the long-term effects but some users may be at risk of developing mental health problems later in life. Deaths from ecstasy are quite rare, but can be due to heatstroke, heart attacks or asthma attacks.





HEROIN

Slang names include *gear, smack, junk, H*.

Heroin is made from morphine, one of the opiate drugs that come from the opium poppy. It is used by injecting or by smoking, known as 'chasing the dragon'.

Effects - Injecting heroin gives a quick 'rush' of excitement, followed by a peaceful, dreamlike feeling. The person feels warm, relaxed and drowsy. Pain, aggression and sexual drive are all reduced.

Side-effects - The side-effects of heroin and other opiates (such as morphine and methadone) include constipation and weaker breathing. However, most of the dangers of heroin come from overdose, and from injecting the drug.

Risks - What is sold on the streets as heroin often contains other substances, such as sugar, flour, talcum powder or other drugs. These substances may seem harmless, but when injected can cause huge damage to a person's body, such as blood clots, abscesses and gangrene. The HIV and hepatitis B and C viruses can be spread through sharing injecting equipment. Addiction to heroin is often the result of regular use, especially when injected.

Methadone is used as a heroin replacement drug to treat heroin addiction. It comes in the form of a green liquid, which people drink once a day to keep away the cravings for heroin. The most serious risk from methadone is death by overdose.



COCAINE

Slang names include *coke, Charlie, snow*.

Cocaine is a white powder made from the leaves of the coca plant, which grows mainly in South America. It is usually used by snorting the powder up the nose. 'Crack' cocaine is not a different drug, but a different, more addictive form of cocaine. 'Crack', which is also called 'rock', 'stone' or 'free-base', is usually smoked. Cocaine is sometimes injected.

Effects - Cocaine is a powerful stimulant, and users feel more alert and energetic, and also feel less hungry or thirsty. These effects can last for up to 20 minutes after each use. Smoking 'crack' cocaine gives a shorter but more intense high.

Side-effects - Because of its powerful effects, cocaine users are often left craving for more. Large doses can lead to exhaustion, anxiety and depression, and sometimes users may become aggressive.

Risks - Snorting cocaine can cause permanent damage to the inside of the nose. Cocaine use can damage the heart and lungs, and high doses can cause death from heart attacks or blood clots. The depression that follows the 'high' can be severe, and can lead to suicide attempts. With long-term or binge use, the excitement caused by cocaine can turn to restlessness, sleep loss and weight loss. Some people can develop a paranoid psychosis where they may be violent. The strong cravings for cocaine, especially 'crack', can lead to an urge to take the drug all the time, and the person can lose control of their drug use.



AMPHETAMINES

Slang names include *speed*, *whizz*, *uppers*.

Amphetamines are a group of stimulant drugs, some of which were used years ago as slimming tablets. They usually come as a white-grey powder, sold in folded paper packages called 'wraps'. They are usually taken by mouth, but can also be injected or snorted. A type known as 'ice' or 'crystal' can be smoked.

Effects - These differ depending on how the drug is taken. A small dose by mouth makes users feel more alert and energetic. Higher doses are taken when injecting or smoking the drug, and give a 'rush' of pleasure. Some 'speed' users go on binges and become overactive and talkative.

Side-effects - As with other stimulant drugs, users experience a 'crash' after the 'high' caused by the drug. High doses of amphetamines can cause panic, paranoia and hallucinations. With long-term use, a condition known as 'amphetamine psychosis' can develop, with symptoms similar to schizophrenia. The paranoia can cause people to become violent if they believe they are being threatened or persecuted.

Risks - Amphetamine psychosis can continue after the person has stopped using the drug. If a person becomes aggressive or violent, they could get into dangerous situations. The risks from injecting are the same as other drugs, such as heroin.

SOLVENTS

Solvent abuse is most common among teenagers. For most teenagers solvent abuse is a passing fad, but it can cause huge problems at school and in the home.

Commonly abused solvents include products found in most homes, such as glues, paint thinner, nail polish remover, lighter fuels and aerosol sprays such as deodorants. They are inhaled from a soaked rag, coat sleeve or directly from a bottle. Aerosols are often sprayed directly into the mouth and lungs.

Effects - Inhaling solvents can give a 'high' or 'buzz' which is like feeling drunk, and the effects usually wear off after about half an hour. The user can appear drunk, with slurred speech, staggering, giggling and lack of control, and they can feel drowsy afterwards.

Side-effects - A person's judgement can be affected and they can become aggressive. Hallucinations, vomiting and blackouts are also common. There is usually a hangover after use, with headache and poor concentration.

Risks - Deaths from solvent abuse are rare but they can happen for a variety of reasons, and can happen the first time they are used. People under the influence of solvents are more likely to have accidents. They may also choke, either on the solvent itself when sprayed into the lungs, or on their vomit. Users who place a plastic bag over their heads to try and get a better effect could suffocate. Many solvents can also cause heart failure.





LSD

Slang name *acid*.

LSD usually comes as tiny tablets known as 'dots' or 'tabs', in or on small squares of paper or cardboard. These 'tabs' usually have various pictures or logos on them, and are swallowed.

Effects - LSD is a hallucinogenic drug. About one hour after taking a 'tab', it causes a 'trip' where the user's environment appears different, with colours, sounds and objects appearing unreal or abnormal. During a 'trip' the person may see visions and hear voices, and time seems to slow down or speed up. The effects can last for around 12 hours.

Side-effects - It's hard to predict what kind of 'trip' a person will have. During a 'bad trip', a person may feel terrified, feel they are losing control, going mad or dying. A 'bad trip' is more likely if the person is already feeling anxious or depressed before taking a 'tab'.

Risks - A 'bad trip' can trigger mental illness in some people. 'Good trips' can also be dangerous, for example if a person has delusions that they can fly or walk on water. A person can also get 'flashbacks', where they feel they are back on a 'trip' for a short period of time, during the weeks and months after a 'trip'. These 'flashbacks' can be distressing.

Magic mushrooms are hallucinogenic mushrooms that grow in the wild. They can be eaten raw or cooked, or made into a tea. The effects of magic mushrooms are similar to a mild, shorter LSD 'trip'. As with LSD, people can have 'bad trips' that could be frightening. There is also the risk that people might eat poisonous mushrooms by mistake, thinking they are magic mushrooms.

OTHER DRUGS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DANCE OR CLUBBING SCENE

POPPERS:

Chemical names are amyl nitrite, butyl nitrite. 'Poppers' are chemicals that come in liquid form, usually in small bottles. The vapour from the bottle is inhaled through the nose.

Effects - 'Poppers' cause a 'rush' which lasts for about five minutes. The blood pressure falls and the heart pumps faster. Users report an increase in sexual arousal and a greater sense of enjoyment of music and dancing.

Side-effects - These drugs can make a person feel sick and dizzy, and sometimes cause blackouts.

Risks - 'Poppers' are especially dangerous for people with heart or breathing problems. The liquid can be poisonous if swallowed.

KETAMINE:

Slang names include *Vitamin K*, *Special K*, *Kit-Kat*.

Ketamine is a powerful tranquilliser and anaesthetic used in veterinary medicine. It is usually taken as a tablet or snorted as a powder. It causes hallucinations, aggressive behaviour, blackouts and temporary blindness.

GHB:

Chemical names are sodium oxybate or gammahydroxybutyrate. Slang names include *GBH*, '*Liquid Ecstasy*'

Despite the slang name of 'liquid ecstasy', GHB is a totally different chemical to ecstasy with different effects. It is an anaesthetic drug that can very quickly make someone unconscious.

