NCADD
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

Frequently Asked Questions and Facts

As a young person, you'll hear everything there is to hear about alcohol and other drugs from friends, your brother or sister or other young people.

Unfortunately, much of what you hear from them is based on myth and misconception and, as a result, it may not always be true or accurate. So, like anything else in life, you need to do your own homework and Learn About Alcohol and Learn About Drugs.

For some of you, you have already seen firsthand the dangers of alcohol and drugs and the damage they can do to the individual, to relationships, to friendships and to families. Maybe you are concerned about mom or dad, an uncle, a friend, a neighbor or even yourself. If so, you will find the information in For Family and Friends to be helpful.

So, ***what's the REAL story about alcohol and other drugs?***

Facts About Alcohol and Drugs:

Fact: Alcohol and drugs are the leading causes of crime among youth.

Fact: Alcohol and drugs are the leading factors in teenage suicide.

Fact: More than 23 million people over the age of 12 are addicted to alcohol and other drugs, affecting millions more people…..spouses, children, family

members, friends, neighbors and colleagues at work.

Fact: Marijuana and Grades: 19.3% of students ages 12-17 who receive average grades of "D" or lower used marijuana in the past month and 6.9% of students with grades of "C" or above used marijuana in the past month.

Fact: Not Everyone Is Using Drugs

One reason some teens decide to start smoking marijuana, drinking alcohol or using other drugs is because they think "everyone is doing it." And, since they think that the majority of their peers are using drugs, they draw the conclusion that it must be OK. If most of the people that you are hanging out with are drinking alcohol or using drugs, it's easy to think that "everyone is doing it." But statistics do not back up that claim.

Most Teens Aren't Using Drugs: If you think "everyone is doing it," consider the facts. Most students go all the way through high school without ever doing drugs or getting drunk. The annual **Monitoring the Future (MTF)** nationwide survey of thousands of 12th grade students asks seniors about their use of alcohol and drugs **during their lifetime**:

- 53.3% never used any illegal drug.
- 58% never smoked marijuana.
- 90.5% never did inhalants.
- 90.7% never did tranquilizers.
- 91.8% never did barbiturates.
- 93.5% never did ecstasy.
- 94% never did cocaine.
- 96.1% never did LSD.
- 97.6% never did methamphetamine.
- 98.8% never did heroin.

Make Your Own Choices: Given the above statistics, if you are hanging out with a group in which the majority of kids are using drugs to get high, you may want to think about making some new friends. You may be headed toward an alcohol and drug problem if you continue to hang around others who routinely drink alcohol, smoke marijuana, abuse prescription drugs or use illegal drugs. **You don't have to go along to get along.**

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's): Alcohol and Drugs

Question: Why is age of first use of alcohol so critically important?

Answer: Kids who start drinking alcohol before age 15 are 5 times more likely to develop alcohol abuse or dependence than people who first used alcohol at age 21 or older. A study published in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* showed that 47% of those who began drinking before age 15 experienced alcohol dependence at some point in their life, compared to 9% percent of those who began drinking at age 21 or older.

Question: Can you get addicted even though you only do it once in a while?

Answer: YES. For most, addiction to alcohol and drugs is a process - not an event. Most people who use alcohol and drugs do so with an intention of only using once or "once in a while." No one decides that they want to become addicted to alcohol and drugs. But, we are dealing with addictive drugs that directly affect the brain. It is easy for occasional use to change to frequent use or constant use--that is addiction. The only thing we know for sure: **if you don't drink alcohol and don't do drugs, you definitely won't become addicted.**

Question: Does marijuana use lead to the use of other drugs?

Answer: While most marijuana smokers do not go on to use other illegal drugs, long-term studies of high school students show that few young people use other illegal drugs without first using marijuana. Using marijuana puts people in contact with people who are users and sellers of other drugs and are more likely to be exposed to and urged to try other drugs.

Question: Why do some people become addicted, while others don't?

Answer: Risk factors for becoming addicted to alcohol and drugs, like other conditions and diseases, vary from person to person. But, the common risk factors include: 1. Genetics--your family history; 2. Age when you start using alcohol or drugs; 3. Family (including abuse, neglect and traumatic experiences in childhood) and Social Environment (including access to alcohol and drugs), and 4. Types of drugs used.

Question: Should I be concerned about prescription drugs when the "real problem" is the illegal drugs like cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine?

Answer: As a teen you should be concerned about alcohol and all of the other drugs, legal and

illegal. Recently there has been a significant increase in the non-medical use of prescription pain drugs among young people. In fact, after marijuana, the next three most commonly used drugs are the non-medical use of prescription pain medications: Vicodin, OxyContin and Adderall.

Question: I thought drinking and driving was the only alcohol-related risk for college students?

Answer: An estimated 1,900 young people under the age of 21 die each year from alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes. And, approximately 600,000 college students are unintentionally injured while under the influence of alcohol. Approximately 700,000 students are assaulted by other students who have been drinking and about 100,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape (from NCADD Fact Sheet: Facts About Underage Drinking).

Question: What drugs are the most commonly abused?

Answer: Each year, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) tracks drug use trends among high school students (8th, 10th and 12th grades) through the Monitoring the Future Study (MTF). The following is a list of the most commonly abused drugs among 12th graders, starting with the most frequent: marijuana (21.4% of high school seniors used marijuana in the past 30 days….more than the number smoking cigarettes – 19.2%); Vicodin, amphetamines, cough medicine, Adderall, tranquilizers, salvia, hallucinogens, OxyContin, sedatives, MDMA/ecstasy, inhalants, cocaine and Ritalin.

Question: Can a person be too young to become addicted to alcohol and drugs?

Answer: No. And, research and experience show that the younger someone starts using alcohol and drugs, the greater the chance that they will become addicted.

Question: Marijuana is just a plant... is it really that dangerous?

Answer: Yes, marijuana is a plant **but** it has very real health consequences, including drug addiction. While some people think marijuana is a “harmless drug,” actual experience and the real science show a different reality. **More teens are in treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other illegal drugs combined.**

Question: How do I know if I or someone close to me is addicted to alcohol or drugs?

Answer: The short answer….if you or someone close to you is having a problem with alcohol or drugs and they continue to use, it's time to get help. Continued use, despite negative consequences, is a powerful indicator of addiction. To learn more, visit For Friends and Family, Signs and Symptoms.

Question: What is a "standard drink" of alcohol?
Answer: A standard alcohol drink contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol (0.6 ounces):

- 12-ounces of Beer or Cooler
- 8-ounces of Malt Liquor
- 5-ounces of Wine
- 1.5-ounces or "shot" of Distilled Spirits/Liquor (*e.g.*, rum, gin, vodka, or whiskey).

Note: These are approximate, as different brands and types of alcoholic beverages vary in their actual alcohol content.

Question: How does alcohol leave the body?

Answer: Once absorbed into the bloodstream, the **Kidneys** eliminate 5% of alcohol in the urine, the **Lungs** exhale 5% of alcohol (detectable by breathalyzer) and the **Liver** breaks down the remaining 90% of alcohol. Alcohol is broken down (metabolized) by the liver at the average rate of one standard drink per hour and nothing can speed this up, including drinking coffee.

Question: Are alcoholism and drug addiction genetically inherited?

Answer: Research shows that the risk for developing alcoholism and drug addiction runs in families. But just because there is a genetic predisposition doesn't mean that the child of an alcoholic or addicted parent will automatically become alcoholic or addicted. Not all children of alcoholic or addicted parents get into trouble with alcohol and drugs. And some people develop alcoholism and addiction even though no one in their family has a drinking or drug problem.

Question: Can alcoholism and drug addiction be treated?

Answer: Yes, alcoholism and addiction can be treated. Alcoholism and addiction treatment programs can help a person stop drinking and using drugs. Treatment has helped millions of people stop drinking and drugging, rebuild their lives and live a life in long-term recovery.

Question: I think prescription drugs might help me feel better. Is it OK to use them once in a while?

Answer: You or your friends might think that prescription drugs are safer than alcohol or illegal drugs because doctors prescribe them. But, these drugs can be just as dangerous.

When prescription drugs are used without a prescription they can be as dangerous as alcohol or illegal drugs. You can die from abusing prescription drugs . . . even the first time.

For additional information, Learn About Alcohol, Learn About Drugs or Get Help may be helpful.