NCADD
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

FAQs/FACTS

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), an estimated 20 million Americans aged 12 or older used an illegal drug in the past 30 days. This estimate represents 8% percent of the population aged 12 years old or older. Illicit drugs include marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, or prescription drugs used without a prescription.

And, despite the numbers, for many people, the Facts About Drugs are not clear.

Facts About Drugs:

Marijuana: Each year more teens enter addiction treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than all other illegal drugs combined.

Cost to Society: The estimated cost of drug abuse exceeds $190 Billion:

- $130 Billion in lost productivity
- $20 Billion in healthcare costs
- $40 Billion in legal costs including efforts to stem the flow of drugs

Beyond the financial cost is the cost to individuals, families and society:

- Spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C, either through sharing of drug paraphernalia or unprotected sex
- Deaths due to overdose or other complications from drug use
- Effects on unborn children of pregnant drug users
- Impact on the family, crime and homelessness

Most Commonly Used and Abused Drugs:

Without question, the most commonly used and abused drug, after alcohol, is marijuana. Other common drugs of abuse include cocaine, heroin, inhalants, LSD(acid), MDMA (ecstasy), methamphetamine, phencyclidine (PCP), steroids (anabolic), Vicodin, OxyContin and other prescription drugs. For additional information about specific drugs including information by drug category, street name, how it is used and health risks: Commonly Abused Drugs or for information on prescription drugs: Selected Prescription Drugs With Potential For Abuse.

Short-Term Effects of Drug Use:

Drugs are chemicals and while each drug produces different physical effects, all abused substances share one thing in common. They hijack the normal function of the brain and change the way the brain responds to issues of self-control, judgment, emotion, motivation, memory and learning.

This is why the person feels differently — the signals coming and going from the brain have been changed. Although this can cause temporary euphoria it can also cause hallucinations, anxiety, paranoia, and uncontrolled behavior. It can cause your respiratory (lungs) and cardiovascular (heart) systems to malfunction or fail.

And, there are social consequences to using drugs including losing the trust of friends and family; poor performance at school or work; quitting activities you enjoy; making bad decisions like placing yourself at risk to be a victim of violence, drugged driving; getting pregnant and surrounding yourself with other people who use drugs.

Long-Term Effects of Drug Use?

Beyond the short-term risks and consequences are the potential long-term effects. It depends on the drug, but all drugs can cause negative health effects and can lead to addiction.

Whether you become addicted to marijuana, OxyContin, heroin, Xanax, cocaine, methamphetamine or Vicodin, the effect on the brain and your life is the same: an uncontrollable craving to keep using that is more important than anything else in your life, including your family, friends, co-workers, career, school and even your own health, security and happiness.

Am I Addicted?

Are you concerned about the role drugs play in your life? With 20 questions, this simple self-test is intended to help you determine if you or someone you know needs to find out more about drug addiction. This test does *not* include alcohol. To take a self-test focused specifically on alcohol use, take the quiz, Am I Alcoholic.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's): Drugs:

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 drug users become addicted, while others don't?

Answer: Risk factors for becoming drug addicted, 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 taking drugs, 3. Family (including abuse, neglect and traumatic experiences in childhood) and Social Environment (including access to drugs) and 4. Types of drugs used.

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

Answer: YES. For most, drug addiction is a process - not an event. Most people who use drugs do so with an intention of only using once or once in a while. No one decides that they want to be an addict. 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 do drugs, you definitely won't become addicted.**

Question: Are over-the-counter (OTC) drugs dangerous?

Answer: All drugs, regardless of whether they are illegal, prescription or over-the-counter

(available without a prescription), change your body and can be potentially harmful. Some over-the-counter drugs can cause serious problems or even death, if used incorrectly. The only safe way to take any over-the-counter medication is exactly as directed and for the specific problem for which it is intended.

Example: OTC Cough and Cold Remedies: The health risks of abusing OTC cough and cold remedies include impaired judgment, nausea, loss of coordination, headache, vomiting, loss of consciousness, numbness, stomach pain, irregular heartbeat, seizures, panic attacks, cold flashes, dizziness, diarrhea, addiction, restlessness, insomnia, high blood pressure, coma, and death. Like any other drug, overdoses from over-the-counter medication can occur.

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 drugs?

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

Question: Are prescription drugs dangerous?

Answer: All drugs are chemicals that affect the body and how it functions. Unfortunately, too many people don't realize that prescription drugs can be as dangerous as street drugs. Prescription drugs require a prescription from a doctor because they are powerful substances, need to be regulated and taken under a physician's care.

Even if a person is prescribed a medication, taking more of that drug than the

recommended dosage is dangerous, including accidental overdose. Medical supervision is needed to avoid dangerous drug interactions, as well as potentially serious side effects. And, **prescription drugs can be addictive**. Between 1995 and 2005, treatment admissions for abuse of prescription pain relievers grew more than 300%. **Using prescription drugs without a prescription and medical supervision is unsafe and illegal.**

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 drugs?

Answer: The short answer….if you or someone close to you is having a problem with 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: How quickly can I become addicted to a drug?

Answer: There is no easy answer because there are many different factors involved. A person's genetic makeup (family history of alcoholism or addiction) clearly plays a role. In fact, that's why some people seem to become addicted almost immediately, but for others, it may take more time. And, some drugs are more addictive than others. For some, one time use can prove to be fatal. Choosing to use drugs is like playing a game of chance. But, if you do, **the earlier you stop**, the more likely you will be to **avoid addiction** and the harmful brain changes that result.

Question: What is drug addiction?

Answer: Addiction is a chronic disease. It is a complex disease characterized by craving, seeking and using drugs that affects every organ system in the body, including the brain. Repeated use of

drugs changes the brain—including the way it looks and functions. The changes in the brain interfere with a person's ability to think clearly, exercise good judgment, control behavior, and feel normal without using drugs.

Question: If drug addiction is a disease, is there a cure?

Answer: There is no *cure* for drug addiction, but it is a treatable disease and millions of people are living lives in long-term recovery. Recovery from drug addiction, like other chronic diseases, is a lifelong process. Just as the addiction has impacted every aspect of your life physically, emotionally and socially, recovery requires making major changes to the way you live, deal with life's problems, and relate to others.

For additional information, Learn About Alcohol, Get Help or For Family and Friends may be helpful.