

PREVENTION

INTERVENTION

RETENTION

ILLICIT & PRESCRIPTION DRUGS
ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES
TOOLKIT

OVERVIEW

Drug use on college campuses is a multifaceted issue influenced by factors like socializing, academic pressure, mental health challenges, and peer influence. While alcohol may be the most talked-about substance, the drug use on campuses encompasses a complex spectrum, ranging from prescription medications to illicit substances.

Let's explore the risks and consequences associated with different substances, avoidance strategies, addiction recovery, and the role of education and support services in promoting healthier choices.

WHAT ARE ILLICIT DRUGS?

The term “illicit drugs” can be used to describe any illegal substance like MDMA, heroin, meth, cocaine, LSD, and ketamine. While the effects of each drug vary, they share one crucial similarity: illicit drugs are highly addictive.

These substances have no medical benefits and are made illegally using a lethal combination of natural and synthetic ingredients. The risks of illicit drug use include addiction, serious health complications, overdose, and death. While the drugs are dangerous on their own, people who make and sell these substances dilute the product to increase profits. This method is called “cutting.” Unfortunately, it is impossible to know what has been mixed in, and usually, these additives are even more dangerous than the drug.

WHAT ARE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS?

Prescription drugs can be legally obtained with a valid prescription from a licensed physician. If you are prescribed these drugs and use them according to doctor instructions, they are generally safe. However, many people with no related medical condition take prescription drugs to get high. When used without doctor supervision, prescription drugs can be highly addictive and lead to similar consequences as illicit drug use, including overdose and death.

WHY ARE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS DANGEROUS IF THEY ARE DOCTOR APPROVED?

Prescription drugs are generally okay to use under medical supervision. However, non-medical use leads to substance abuse, addiction, overdose, and possibly death (DEA, 2018). Prescription drugs become dangerous when they are used in a way other than prescribed, taken for the sole reason of getting high, and/or mixed with other drugs.

It can be easy for young adults to try prescription drugs. Whether they find them at home in the medicine cabinet or take some for a friend's valid prescription, experimenting is a major issue with teenagers. However, once addiction sets in and their tolerance increases, it becomes challenging and expensive to get prescription drugs on the street. As a result, many prescription drug addicts turn to illicit substances like heroin.

HIDDEN DANGERS OF ILLICIT DRUGS

Illicit drugs are made illegally in unregulated labs using undisclosed ingredients and formulas. It is impossible to know what is in any drug. The goal of dealers is to make as much money as possible, so many lace or cut drugs with cheap substitutions, diluting their purity and stretching the supply. Illicit substances can be cut with anything from other drugs like fentanyl to baby powder to rat poison.



MOST USED ILLICIT DRUGS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

COCAINE

Cocaine is glamorized in TV shows and movies as being a fun party drug. However, cocaine is highly addictive and dangerous. Also known as coke, blow, and snow, cocaine is an unregulated illicit substance that looks like white powder. It can be snorted, smoked, or injected.

Cocaine affects the central nervous system and causes extreme feelings of happiness and energy (Center, 2024). Common side effects of cocaine are hyper-alertness, lack of inhibition, overconfidence, frenzied energy or excitement, and talkativeness. Snorting cocaine produced the longest high, approximately 30 minutes. However, as the body adjusts to its effects, users need more to get high, leading to overconsumption and dependence. Cocaine stresses the heart and increases the risk of cardiac arrest and stroke.

Dealers mix harmful additives like boric acid, other drugs, or household items like talcum powder or flour. The process of lacing or cutting cocaine makes the drug more profitable to dealers and exceptionally dangerous for users. There is no way to know what cocaine is cut with, increasing the risk of overdose and death.

ECSTASY/MDMA

MDMA, Ecstasy, and Molly are all popular party drugs (Ecstasy or MDMA (*Also Known as Molly*), n.d.). These substances are stimulants and hallucinogens designed to lower inhibitions, distort time, and create a false sense of euphoria. Available in pill and powder form, MDMA can be swallowed or snorted. The pills are usually made in fun, bright colors with unique icons stamped.

The main effects of Ecstasy and Molly are feelings of closeness that can replicate love, heightened sexuality, sensitivity to sights, smell, and taste, lowered inhibitions, extreme joy, and empathy for others. These drugs increase dopamine levels, creating feelings of intense pleasure and happiness. The high from Ecstasy or Molly can last 5-8 hours.

Ecstasy and Molly are usually laced with other substances like cocaine, LSD, caffeine, and rat poison (Center, 2024b). Nearly all illicit drugs, MDMA, Ecstasy, and Molly are highly addictive and can lead to overdose and death.

LSD/MUSHROOMS/PCP

These illegal drugs are all hallucinogens that alter reality to create an out-of-body experience (Center, 2023). While addiction is possible, the more considerable risk of using these substances is physical danger and death. These drugs can make you see and hear things that aren't real. However, the user responds as though it is reality. Accidental suicide is an unfortunate consequence that occurs often when high.

- PCP is a synthetic drug that forces the brain to disassociate, producing psychedelic effects. It is generally sold as a powder and can be snorted, smoked, or injected. Other names for PCP are Angel Dust, Zoom, and Killer Weed. High doses of PCP can cause seizures and coma.
- LSD or Acid is compared to MDMA or Ketamine. It can cause visions, blurred sense, and altered reality. Acids affect serotonin levels, resulting in lost control of behavioral and regulatory systems.
- Mushrooms are psychedelics that are chemically similar to LSD. The high alters reality and orchestrates a mystical experience. Unfortunately, users cannot discern fantasy from reality, and the hallucinations can prompt episodes of depression, panic attacks, and extreme terror.

MOST USED PRESCRIPTION DRUGS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES



ADDERALL

Adderall is prescribed to people diagnosed with ADHD. It stimulates the central nervous system to promote focus, especially for those with attention deficit. While Adderall is generally safe for use under doctor supervision, it is dangerous for recreational use.

Many college students try Adderall when they feel overwhelmed or stressed about grades (PharmD, 2019). The allure of sharpened focus, increased attention span, and better concentration seem like a quick fix to help cram for exams. In addition, Adderall can help ward off sleepiness, making it possible to study all night. Naturally, shy people might become more talkative or outgoing on Adderall, making it an appealing drug for those seeking social acceptance.

Adderall dependence is a severe issue that can affect your health negatively in several ways, such as:

- Sleep deprivation and insomnia
- Persistent headaches and nausea
- Extreme weight loss
- Digestive issues, including diarrhea, vomiting, and loss of appetite
- Uncontrollable tremors

It is very dangerous to use Adderall with other drugs, especially alcohol. Alcohol and Adderall work in opposite ways, which can make it impossible to monitor consumption.

OPIOIDS

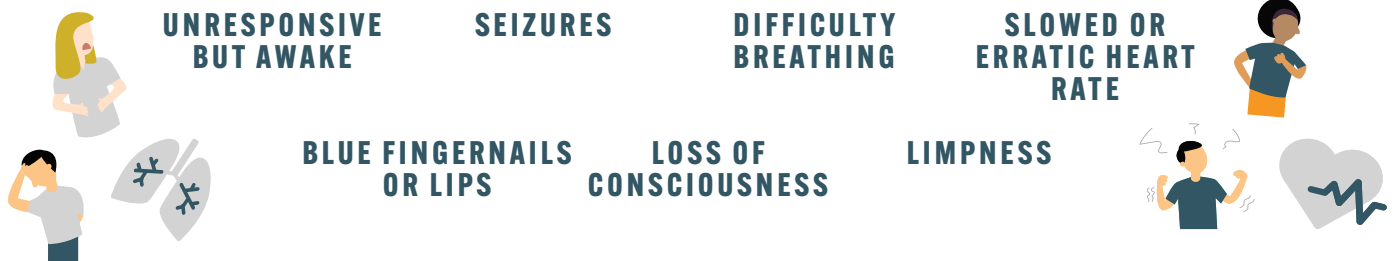
Prescription opioids are painkillers prescribed for chronic or debilitating pain. Popular opioid drugs are Vicodin, Percocet, and OxyContin. For decades, opioids were liberally prescribed by doctors. However, as studies revealed their highly addictive qualities, the attitude around prescription opioids has shifted dramatically.

In addition to pain management, opioids produce an intense high. Continued use will build up a tolerance to these drugs, forcing those addicted to opioids to use them in larger quantities. Overdose is the leading concern of opioid use. In fact, people in the US have a greater chance of dying from accidental opioid overdose than a car crash (Painkiller Abuse and College Students: What You Need to Know, 2022). As addiction builds, it is common for users to look for cheaper and easier-to-get substances like heroin and fentanyl.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK A FRIEND IS OVERDOSING

The risk of overdose is a top concern with illicit and prescription drug use. Overdoses occur when a toxic amount of a substance overwhelms the body's regulatory systems (Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.). Symptoms of an overdose are not always obvious, and reactions can be delayed depending on the body's response and type of drug used.

Common signs of an overdose are:



If you suspect someone is having an overdose, follow these critical steps:

1. *Stay calm and try not to panic.*
2. *Call 911.*
3. *Administer Narcan if available.*
4. *Turn the person on their side to prevent choking.*
5. *Keep the person awake as long as possible.*
6. *Stay until emergency services arrive.*



ADDICTION RECOVERY

Illicit and prescription drugs are highly addictive, and users should seek professional treatment for help. Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is a chronic disease that cannot be managed alone (Recovery Is Possible for Everyone: *Understanding Treatment of Substance Use Disorders* | *Feature Topics* | *Drug Overdose*, n.d.).

Standard addiction recovery methods include:

- Medical treatment, including medications to help combat withdrawal symptoms and curb cravings.
- Psychological therapy to uncover underlying mental issues or traumas that addiction can mask.
- In-patient rehabilitation is a holistic all-body option for addiction recovery. Many centers take health insurance.
- Sober living facilities are an excellent option for those transitioning to regular life as a sober person.
- Family therapy can help educate those close to a person with a substance use disorder and promote healing.
- Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings are free and empowering tools to find support from other recovering addicts.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE A FRIEND USING DRUGS

It's important to remember that you are not responsible for anyone's actions but your own. However, wanting the best for your friends and loved ones is natural. If you see a friend using drugs, do your best to dissuade them. Starting a conversation from a place of empathy and understanding rather than judgment is effective. To help a high friend, try doing one or all of these things:

- Encourage them to leave with you and return to a safe place like your home.
- Supply food and water.
- Monitor their vitals and make sure they remain awake and alert.
- Seek medical assistance if you think they may be overdosing or become a danger to themselves or others.

Illicit drugs can cause hallucinations and distort reality. As a result, highs can become extremely dangerous.

If you feel unsafe, call 911 and remove yourself from the situation.

How to Say No to **ILLICIT & PRESCRIPTION DRUGS**

The pressure to use drugs can be intense, especially when partying and exploring your newfound freedom at college. However, a brief high is not worth the consequences. From overdose to accidental death, illicit and prescription drugs are not something to experiment with.

If you are in a situation where people are encouraging you to use illegal substances, here are some practical ways to say “no” and still have fun (Tala Johartchi, PsyD & Ali Garbacz, B.A., 2023).

JUST SAY NO

If you decline in a firm tone, most people will stop asking. Stating that you do not use drugs right away can help avoid future pressures.

FAKE A DISTRACTION

Ignore the person and immediately start engaging in another activity. Whether that means moving somewhere else while dancing or stepping outside, removing yourself

SAY YOU ALREADY TOOK SOMETHING

Sometimes, lying is the easiest solution. Say you don’t want to mix with what you are on.

SHARE YOUR JOURNEY WITH SOBRIETY

Living a sober life is super common. Explain your health goals and the way you live your life and that while you don’t judge those who do, drugs don’t align with your lifestyle.

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