

Some Questions & Answers on

DRUGS

What You Wanted to Know

1. What is a Drug?

A drug is any substance, other than food, that when taken into the body can change the way the body normally functions.

2. How do Drugs Affect the Body?

Drugs can be grouped into three categories by how they affect the body:

- **Stimulants** are drugs that speed up the functioning of the brain, spinal cord and nerves. Examples of stimulants are nicotine and caffeine.

- **Depressants** are drugs that slow down the way the brain works. Some examples of depressants are alcohol, tranquilizers and sleeping pills.

- **Selective agents** are drugs that can have some of the effects of both a depressant and a stimulant, but people taking this drug cannot be sure, before they take it, just what effect the drug will have on them at that time. Examples of selective agents are marijuana, PCP (angel dust) and inhalants.

3. Are Drugs Good or Bad?

It is not the drug that is necessarily “good” or “bad”, but how people use the drug. Some drugs, however, have no healthy use, like PCP, LSD or nicotine.

There are three kinds of drugs:

- **Prescription drugs** – ones that we get from a doctor like painkillers, penicillin, insulin, Valium®, etc.

- **Over-the-counter drugs** – ones that we buy off the shelf at a drugstore like Aspirin® and cough syrup.

- **Non-medical drugs** – ones that we use for the feeling they give us and are not taken for any medical reason. These drugs can be legal or within the law to use, like alcohol, if you’re over the age of 18, or illegal and against the law to use, like marijuana.

4. How can Medicine be Misused?

Medicines help to prevent and to fight disease. However, if people don’t take their medicines properly, they can cause themselves harm. For example, misuse can be: taking more or less of the medicine than the doctor said, taking the medicine for the wrong reason or mixing the medicine with other drugs such as alcohol.

5. Why do People use Drugs that have no Medical Purpose?

Drugs that are not used for a medical reason are usually taken to affect a person’s mood. Some take drugs to feel good or to help them forget their unhappy feelings. But drugs don’t solve problems – they will still be there for a person to deal with at a later time; or the problem may even increase because of what that person might do while under the influence of the drug.

6. What is a Street Drug?

Street drugs are drugs that are sold illegally or against the law. They may be drugs like marijuana, heroin, LSD or PCP. They may also be prescription or over-the-counter drugs that are being sold by someone other than a

pharmacist or a drug store. It is almost impossible for a person to tell if a drug has been changed in some way or mixed with another drug and this often happens with street drugs. A person may not be getting what they think they’re buying. Because of this, these drugs can be harmful and may even cause death.

7. What are Side Effects?

Side effects are the effects of the drug that are not wanted. For example, a drug may make a person “feel good” for a while, but it may also cause that person to feel dizzy, nervous or sick.

8. Are All Drugs “Addicting”?

Some drugs can cause a physical dependency, which means that a person’s body becomes so used to the regular use of the drug that they have a hard time functioning normally without it. However, with any drug, people can become psychologically dependent or addicted to its use. They may feel that they cannot stop taking the drug, or using it becomes all they really think or care about.

9. What is “Withdrawal”?

Withdrawal is what happens to a person, who has become dependent on a drug, when they try to stop using the drug. That person may feel jumpy, have headaches or feel very sad and confused. With some drugs, a person may need the help of a doctor in order to stop using, or they may suffer serious health problems or even die.

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10. Do I Have to be Dependent on a Drug before Something Harmful can Happen to Me?

Sometimes using a drug for a long period of time can cause long-lasting damage to a person's body and may even cause death. But dependence doesn't have to happen for a drug to cause someone harm. People using a drug, like a street drug for the first time, have died from using it. Sometimes people don't know how to use a drug the correct way or they take a couple of drugs together that shouldn't be taken at the same time. This kind of use can be harmful. Some drugs can affect a person's ability to make the right decision and accidents can happen, like falls, drownings or car accidents.

11. Glossary

Here is a glossary of words that are often used when talking about drugs.

1. **Depressants** – Drugs that slow down or depress the way the brain works.
2. **Drugs** – Any substance (other than food) that, when taken into the body, can change the way the body functions.
3. **Long-term effects** – Symptoms which appear following repeated use of a drug over a long period of time.
4. **Misuse** – The use of a drug in one or more of the following ways: the wrong time, the wrong reason, the wrong amount and/or the wrong place.
5. **Over-the-counter drugs** – Medicines which can be purchased without a doctor's prescription.
6. **Physical dependence** – When the body has become used to the regular use of a drug and can function normally only when the drug is present.
7. **Prescription drugs** – Drugs which can be purchased only with a doctor's prescription.

8. **Psychological dependence** – When a drug is so central to a person's thoughts, emotions and activities that it is extremely difficult to stop using it.
9. **Selective agents** – Drugs which change the function of the brain and can lead to unpredictable behaviour.
10. **Stimulants** – Drugs which speed up the functioning of the brain and central nervous system.
11. **Short-term effects** – The immediate effects from using a drug.
12. **Tolerance** – Over time and with regular use, the user needs more and more of a drug to get the same effect.
13. **Withdrawal** – The reactions that happen to a dependent person ceasing to take a drug.

Part of growing up is making decisions and choices. One of the choices you may be faced with at some time is whether or not to use drugs. In making any kind of a decision, it's best to learn all you can before you make up your mind. Also, it can help if you talk to your parent(s) or teacher to find out what they think.

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A Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery Group
addressing addictions
and those affected by them