



Home → Health Topics → Drugs and Young People

URL of this page: <https://medlineplus.gov/drugsandyoungpeople.html>

Drugs and Young People

What is drug use?

Drug use [<https://medlineplus.gov/druguseandaddiction.html>] , or misuse, includes:

- Using illegal substances, such as
 - Anabolic steroids [<https://medlineplus.gov/anabolicsteroids.html>]
 - Club drugs [<https://medlineplus.gov/clubdrugs.html>]
 - Cocaine [<https://medlineplus.gov/cocaine.html>]
 - Heroin [<https://medlineplus.gov/heroin.html>]
 - Inhalants [<https://medlineplus.gov/inhalants.html>]
 - Marijuana [<https://medlineplus.gov/marijuana.html>]
 - Methamphetamines [<https://medlineplus.gov/methamphetamine.html>]
- Misusing prescription medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/prescriptiondrugmisuse.html>] , including opioids [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidsandopiodusedisorderoud.html>] . This means taking the medicines in a different way than the health care provider prescribed. This includes
 - Taking a medicine that was prescribed for someone else
 - Taking a larger dose than you are supposed to
 - Using the medicine in a different way than you are supposed to. For example, instead of swallowing your tablets, you might crush and then snort or inject them.
 - Using the medicine for another purpose, such as getting high
- Misusing over-the-counter medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/overthecountermedicines.html>] , including using them for another purpose and using them in a different way than you are supposed to.

Why are drugs especially dangerous for young people?

Young people's brains are growing and developing until they are their mid-20's. This is especially true of the prefrontal cortex, which is used to make decisions. Taking drugs when young can interfere with developmental processes occurring in the brain. It can also affect their decision-making. They may be more likely to do risky things, such as unsafe sex and dangerous driving.

The earlier young people start using drugs, the greater their chances of continuing to use them and become addicted later in life. Taking drugs when you are young can contribute to the development of adult health problems, such as heart disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartdiseases.html>] , high blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/highbloodpressure.html>] , and sleep disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/sleepdisorders.html>] .

Which drugs most commonly used by young people?

The drugs that are most commonly used by young people are alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/underagedrinking.html>] , tobacco [<https://medlineplus.gov/smoking.html>] , and marijuana. Recently, more young people have started vaping [<https://medlineplus.gov/ecigarettes.html>] tobacco and marijuana. There is still a lot we don't know about the dangers of vaping. Some people have unexpectedly gotten very ill or have even died after vaping. Because of this, young people should stay away from vaping.

Why do young people take drugs?

There are many different reasons why a young person may take drugs, including:

- **To fit in.** Young people may do drugs because they want to be accepted by friends or peers who are doing drugs.
- **To feel good.** Abused drugs can produce feelings of pleasure.
- **To feel better.** Some young people suffer from depression [<https://medlineplus.gov/depression.html>] , anxiety [<https://medlineplus.gov/anxiety.html>] , stress [<https://medlineplus.gov/stress.html>] -related disorders, and physical pain. They may do drugs to try to get some relief.
- **To do better in academics or sports.** Some young people may take stimulants for studying or anabolic steroids to improve their athletic performance.
- **To experiment.** Young people often want to try new experiences, especially ones that they think are thrilling or daring.

Which young people are at risk for drug use?

Different factors may raise a young person's risk for drug use, including:

- Stressful early life experiences, such child abuse [<https://medlineplus.gov/childabuse.html>] , child sexual abuse [<https://medlineplus.gov/childsexualabuse.html>] , and other forms of trauma
- Genetics
- Prenatal exposure [<https://medlineplus.gov/pregnancyandsubstanceuse.html>] to alcohol or other drugs
- Lack of parental supervision or monitoring
- Having peers and/or friends who use drugs

What are the signs that a young person has a drug problem?

- Changing friends a lot
- Spending a lot of time alone
- Losing interest in favorite things
- Not taking care of themselves - for example, not taking showers, changing clothes, or brushing their teeth
- Being really tired and sad
- Eating more or eating less than usual
- Being very energetic, talking fast, or saying things that don't make sense
- Being in a bad mood
- Quickly changing between feeling bad and feeling good
- Missing important appointments
- Having problems at school - missing class, getting bad grades
- Having problems in personal or family relationships
- Lying and stealing
- Memory lapses, poor concentration, lack of coordination, slurred speech, etc.

Can drug use in young people be prevented?

Drug use and addiction are preventable. Prevention programs involving families, schools, communities, and the media may prevent or reduce drug use and addiction. These programs include education and outreach to help people understand the risks of drug use.

You can help prevent your children from using drugs through:

- Good communication with your children
- Encouragement, so your children can build confidence and a strong sense of self. It also helps parents promote cooperation and reduce conflict.
- Teaching your children problem-solving skills
- Setting limits, to teach your children self-control and responsibility, provide safe boundaries, and show them that you care
- Supervision, which helps parents recognize developing problems, promote safety, and stay involved

- Knowing your children's friends

NIH: National Institute on Drug Abuse

Start Here

- College-Age and Young Adults [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/college-age-young-adults>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
- Dealing with Addiction (For Teens) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/addictions.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/addictions.html>]
- Drugs: What to Know (For Teens) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/know-about-drugs.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/know-about-drugs.html>]

Diagnosis and Tests

- Drug Testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/drug-testing/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-drogas/>]
- Should You Drug Test Your Child? [<https://drugfree.org/article/should-you-drug-test-your-child/>] (Partnership to End Addiction)

Prevention and Risk Factors

- Drug Abuse Prevention Starts with Parents [<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/pages/Drug-Abuse-Prevention-Starts-with-Parents.aspx>] (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- Teen Drug Abuse: Help Your Teen Avoid Drugs [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/teen-drug-abuse/art-20045921?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)

Treatments and Therapies

- Substance Abuse Treatment for Children and Adolescents: Questions to Ask [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Substance-Abuse-Treatment-For-Children-And-Adolescents-Questions-To-Ask-041.aspx] (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry)
- What Is Substance Abuse Treatment? A Booklet for Families [<https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma14-4126.pdf>] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) - **PDF**

Related Issues

- How to Identify Drug Paraphernalia [<https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/content/how-identify-drug-paraphernalia>] (Drug Enforcement Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/es/content/how-identify-drug-paraphernalia>]

Videos and Tutorials

- Why Are Drugs So Hard to Quit? [<https://nida.nih.gov/videos/why-are-drugs-so-hard-to-quit>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

Statistics and Research

- Monitoring the Future [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/monitoring-future>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
- Unintentional Drug Overdose Death Rates Among US Youth Aged 15-19 [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/infographics/unintentional-drug-overdose-death-rates-among-us-youth-aged-15-19>]  **Infographic** (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/research-topics/trends-statistics/infographics/tasas-de-mortalidad-por-sobredosis-no-intencionada-entre-los-jovenes-estadounidenses-de-15-19-anos>]

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Drugs and Young People [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22substance+use%22&aggFilters=ages:child,status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Exploratory Impact of iCARE Nigeria, a Combined mHealth and Peer Navigation... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40729632>]
- Article: Potential predictors affecting outcomes in a randomized controlled trial of support... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40635055>]
- Article: Acceptability, feasibility, fidelity and quality implementation of the culturally adapted version... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40394545>]
- Drugs and Young People -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Substance-Related+Disorders%22%5Bmajr%3Aexp%5D+AND+adolescence+%5Bmh%3Aexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bdat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- Drug Enforcement Administration [<https://www.dea.gov/>]
- FindTreatment.gov [<https://findtreatment.gov/>] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://findtreatment.gov/es>]
- National Institute on Drug Abuse [<https://nida.nih.gov/>] 
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es>]
- Partnership to End Addiction [<https://drugfree.org/>]
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [<https://www.samhsa.gov/>]

Children

- What You Need to Know about Drugs (For Kids) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/know-drugs.html>] (Nemours Foundation)

Teenagers

- Mind Matters Series [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/parents-educators/mind-matter-series>] 
(National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/mind-matters-espanol>]

Patient Handouts

- Toxicology screen [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003578.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003578.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Teenagers and drugs [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001975.htm>]

Toxicology screen [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003578.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Club Drugs [<https://medlineplus.gov/clubdrugs.html>]

Cocaine [<https://medlineplus.gov/cocaine.html>]

Cold and Cough Medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/coldandcoughmedicines.html>]

Inhalants [<https://medlineplus.gov/inhalants.html>]

Marijuana [<https://medlineplus.gov/marijuana.html>]

Opioids and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidsandopioidusedisorderoud.html>]

Prescription Drug Misuse [<https://medlineplus.gov/prescriptiondrugmisuse.html>]

Smoking and Youth [<https://medlineplus.gov/smokingandyouth.html>]

Underage Drinking [<https://medlineplus.gov/underagedrinking.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Drugs and Young People* is the National Institute on Drug Abuse [<https://www.drugabuse.gov/>]

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

8 Tips for Talking (and Listening) to Your Teens About Drugs and Alcohol [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/8-tips-for-talking-and-listening-to-your-teens-about-drugs-and-alcohol>]

MedlinePlus links to health information from the National Institutes of Health and other federal government agencies. MedlinePlus also links to health information from non-government Web sites. See our disclaimer [<https://medlineplus.gov/disclaimers.html>] about external links and our quality guidelines [<https://medlineplus.gov/criteria.html>].

The information on this site should not be used as a substitute for professional medical care or advice. Contact a health care provider if you have questions about your health.

[Learn how to cite this page](#)

National Library of Medicine 8600 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20894 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Institutes of Health

Last updated December 18, 2023