

Substance Use Disorders

Substance use: when someone consumes alcohol or drugs. Substance use does not always lead to harmful or problematic use. Many people can drink alcohol or use certain drugs without being addicted (e.g., prescription medication that is used under medical supervision and with prescribed dosages); however, substance use always comes with the risk that it might lead to addiction.

Substance misuse or abuse: when a person consumes alcohol or drugs regularly, despite the fact that it causes issues in their life. The issues caused by abuse may be related to their job, school, personal life, and even their safety and well-being. For example, being late or missing school or impacting relationships. People who abuse drugs or alcohol may continue to use them despite the harm or consequences it may cause.

Substance use disorder (SUD): drug addiction, also called substance use disorder, is a disease that affects a person's brain and behavior and leads to an inability to control the use of a legal or illegal drug or medication despite the harmful consequences. People with SUD have developed a tolerance for the drug, which means they need larger amounts to feel the effects (i.e., to feel good, pleasure and "high") and also experience withdrawal symptoms without drugs or when trying to cut back. A number of effective treatments are available and people can and do recover from substance use disorders.

How substance use changes the brain

Most addictive substances cause the brain to release high levels of chemicals that are associated with pleasure or reward. Over time, continued release of these chemicals causes changes in the brain systems involved in reward, motivation and memory. When these changes occur, a person may need the substance to feel normal. The individual may also experience intense desires or cravings for the addictive substances and will continue to use it despite the harmful or dangerous consequences.

Brain imaging studies show changes in the areas of the brain that relate to judgement, decision making, learning, memory and behavior control. These changes in the brain can remain for a long time, even after the person stops using substances. The good news is that even the most severe, chronic form of a substance use disorder can be manageable and reversible, usually with long term treatment and continued monitoring and support for recovery.

Where to get help.

Talk with your primary care provider or visit www.alaska211.org. Treatment Services Locator: findtreatment.gov.

For emergencies or someone to talk to, call the Alaska Careline: [1-877-266-4357](tel:1-877-266-4357).

For tips on talking with friends or loved ones around substance use disorder visit www.drugabuse.gov/patients-families.

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Alcohol

Booze | Juice | Sauce | Liquor | Spirit

One standard drink of alcohol is equal to: 12oz of beer at 5% alcohol, 5oz of table wine at 12% alcohol, 1.5oz (a “shot”) of liquor at 40% to 80% alcohol.

What is alcohol?

Alcohol is produced by the natural fermentation of sugars and is found in wine, beer and spirits also called liquor. Consuming more than one alcoholic drink per hour can lead to a person getting drunk or intoxicated. Each alcoholic drink raises the amount of alcohol in a person’s blood. When someone consumes several alcoholic beverages in a short amount of time, it is called **binge drinking**.

This publication has been funded at least in part with grant funds from the AmerisourceBergen Foundation. Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

What are the consequences of drinking alcohol?

The effects of alcohol vary depending on age, weight, gender or how much a person drinks:

- Alcohol slows down different areas of the brain affecting how someone makes decisions, behaves or communicates.
 - Alcohol can cause slurred speech, blurry vision, and difficulty remembering what happened.
 - People who use alcohol are also more likely to engage in drinking and driving and having sex without protection, to become aggressive or violent, and are less likely to recognize potential danger.
- The effects of alcohol use are most severe during pregnancy and until age 25. Alcohol use during this time can impact children's, adolescents' and young adults' learning, school performance and memory.
- Continued use of alcohol can lead to developing a substance use disorder (SUD) when a person has to use alcohol just to feel normal or better. It not only affects a person's health but also their work, school, relationships and family.

Where to get help.

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Cocaine

Crack | Coke | Blow | Snow | Flake | Bump | Rock | Candy | Charlie | Toot

Cocaine is a white powder or a crystal rock substance made from the leaves of the coca plant native to South America.

What is Cocaine?

Powder cocaine is a white powder called hydrochloride salt often mixed with other substances like cornstarch, talcum powder, laxatives or sugar or even with other stimulants like amphetamines or synthetic opioids like fentanyl to make the “high” more intense. Crack is a form of cocaine made into a rock crystal that people smoke. “Crack” refers to the cracking sound the rocks make when they are heated. Depending on the form of cocaine, it is either snorted, injected, rubbed on the gums of the teeth (powder cocaine) or heated in a glass pipe to produce vapor (crack).

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What are the consequences of using cocaine?

- Cocaine changes the way nerve cells or “neurons” in the brain communicate using chemicals called “neurotransmitters.” Dopamine is such a neurotransmitter and its role in the brain is to communicate feelings of pleasure.
 - Repeated cocaine use leads to the brain no longer recycling dopamine. This causes intense feelings of happiness and energy or “high”.
 - After the high wears off, many people experience a “crash,” a feeling of tired and sad, which causes them to keep using.
- Short term effects of cocaine include mental alertness, extreme happiness, high energy, paranoia, nausea, and sensitivity to light, sound, and touch.
- People who continuously use cocaine can also have nasal damage, loss of smell, damage to the intestines, weight loss and lung damage.
- People who use cocaine often can also develop a tolerance and they must take more to get the same effect as before.
 - Tolerance often leads to a substance use disorder (SUD) which means a person has to use cocaine just to feel normal or better. A SUD does not only harm a person’s health but also other parts of their life like school, work, relationships and family.
- People who inject cocaine are at increased risk for hepatitis C and HIV if they share infected needles.
- Cocaine use during pregnancy can also be harmful to the unborn baby.

Where to get help.

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Hallucinogens

Rohypnol | Ketamine | GHB

Hallucinogens are substances that alter a person's awareness of their surroundings as well as their own thoughts and feelings. These substances can create hallucinations, or sensations and images that seem real though they are not. These substances are sometimes called “club drugs” as they have been associated with nightclubs, music festivals, raves and dance parties, or “date rape drugs” as they have been associated with sexual assault.

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Hallucinogens

Rohypnol (also known as roofies, forget-me-pill, R-2) is a prescription medication known as benzodiazepine (similar to Valium or Xanax) used to calm someone down or help them sleep. It can make somebody not remember what happened within 30 minutes of taking it and can last for several hours. It has no taste or smell, but the manufacturers have recently added a blue dye to prevent misuse. When dissolved in light-colored drinks, the new pill dye the drink blue to alert people. However, generic versions (not a brand-name) of Rohypnol do not contain the blue dye.

GHB (also known as cherry meth, scoop and goop) is a prescription medication used to treat a sleep disorder. GHB is a powder, tablet, capsule or liquid, takes effect in 15 to 30 minutes and lasts for 3 to 6 hours. It does not have a taste or smell and is colorless when dissolved in a drink. It can cause someone to throw up, slow their heart rate, make breathing more difficult and lead to coma or death at high doses. GHB usually abused for its intoxicating, sedating and euphoria-inducing properties or for its growth hormone-releasing effects. Mixing GHB with alcohol makes its effects worse. Additionally, GHB can be cleared from the body relatively quickly (about 2 hours) and has no detection test, which means it can be undetected in emergency rooms.

Ketamine (also known as K Special K, cat valium, k-hole and purple) is an anesthetic medication used during surgery in humans and animals because it reduces pain and overall feeling. It can make a person feel far away from what is happening around them. Ketamine comes as a powder or liquid and does not have a taste or smell. It can cause hallucinations, increased heartbeat and blood pressure as well as nausea. It can be taken by mouth, snorted, or injected with a needle, and its effects can last between 30 to 60 minutes.

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Heroin

Smack | Junk | Black Tar | Brown Sugar

Heroin is a white or brown powder or a black sticky substance known as black tar heroin. People inject smoke, sniff or snort heroin.

What is heroin?

Heroin is a type of opioid that comes from morphine, a natural substance made from the seed pod of opium poppy plants. It is similar to the opioid pain medication prescribed by a doctor for pain relief. Heroin causes a “rush” of good feelings. It can also make people feel sleepy and dreamy, while slowing down their heart rate and breathing, and cause nausea and vomiting, severe itching and clouded mental functioning.

People who have used heroin for a long time, may experience problems sleeping, collapsed veins from injection drug use (IDU), damaged tissues in the nose from snorting; infection of the heart; abscesses; lung, liver and kidney problems; depression and other mental disorders and sexual dysfunction in men and irregular periods in women.

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What are the consequences of using heroin?

- People who use heroin often develop a tolerance, which means they need higher and more frequent doses to get the same “rush” and can develop a substance use disorder (SUD). This means they cannot stop even if they really want to. If they do they may have severe withdrawal symptoms:
 - **Restlessness, muscle and bone pain, diarrhea, vomiting, cold flashes with goose bumps (“cold turkey”), sleep problems, severe heroin cravings and uncontrollable leg movements.**
- People who inject heroin are at high-risk for getting HIV and hepatitis C when sharing infected needles or equipment (“works”).
- If a person consumes too much heroin they can experience an overdose that causes their brain and body to shut down. Overdose symptoms include:
 - **Slowed or stopped breathing and/or heartbeat**
 - **Blue lips and fingernails**
 - **Cold and damp skin**
 - **Shaking and inability to speak**
- Only a medication called Naloxone or Narcan® can save someone’s life from a heroin (opioid) overdose.
- The effects of heroin use are most severe during pregnancy and until age 25 when the brain develops the most. Heroin use during pregnancy can lead to Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS). NOWS causes withdrawal symptoms in newborns whose mothers used opioids during pregnancy.

Where to get help.

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Inhalants

Bold (nitrites) | Laughing gas (nitrous oxide) | Poppers (amyl nitrite and butyl nitrite) | Rush (nitrites)

Inhalants are chemicals that people inhale to get “high.”

What are inhalants?

Inhalants can easily be bought in a convenience store or found at home or work. Inhaling the fumes of these products by sniffing, snorting, bagging, or huffing can be very harmful to the brain and body and cause death. Inhalants include volatile solvents (nail polish remover, cleaning products, gasoline, and more), aerosol sprays (spray paint, hair spray, and others), gases (butane lighters, propane tanks, and whipped cream dispensers), and nitrates (video head cleaner, room odorizer, leather cleaner or liquid aroma).

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What are the consequences of using inhalants?

- Inhalants enter the body and brain quickly through the lungs and the bloodstream. All inhalants except for nitrites cause a “high” by slowing down brain activity.
- Depending on the type, people who use inhalants may experience serious brain injury, weakened immune system as well as increased risk of cancer, liver damage, changes to heart muscle, breathing problems, and death
- Immediate effects include feeling high or dizzy, hallucinations and delusions, loss of body control and slurred speech as well as sudden sniffing death due to heart stopping or death from suffocation, seizures coma or choking.
- Continuous use of inhalants can cause muscle spasms, tremors, trouble walking, bending and talking and difficulty in learning new things, communication, solving problems and planning ahead as well as moving slowly and clumsily.
- Inhalants can have serious health consequences, even if only used once. Inhalants are often one of the first substances that adolescents use and can continue into adulthood or even lead to a substance use disorder (SUD). It is important to recognize signs early to prevent chronic use:
 - chemical smell on breath or clothing
 - paint or other stains on the face, hands or clothing
 - drunk or disoriented actions
 - slurred speech
 - nausea and loss of appetite and weight
 - confusion, inattentiveness, irritability and depression
 - hidden empty spray paint or solvent containers, or rags or clothing soaked with chemicals
 - purchase of excessive amounts of products used as inhalants

Where to get help.

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Marijuana

Weed | Pot | Mary Jane | Hash | Edibles | Dabbing

Marijuana is made from the dried leaves, stems, flowers and seeds from *Cannabis sativa* or *Cannabis indica* plant.

What is marijuana?

Marijuana contains a chemical called delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol or THC that is responsible for its mind-altering effects and the “high” feeling people experience. People smoke (examples include: dabbing, bong, rolling it papers, and e-cigarettes), inhale, drink, or consume marijuana as an edible. “Dabbing” includes smoking very high concentrations of THC-rich resins and comes in various forms, such as hash oil or honey oil (a gooey liquid), wax or budder (a soft solid with a texture like lip balm), or shatter (a hard, amber colored solid).

Once THC gets to the brain, it attaches to cannabinoid “receptors” that receive and transmit signals in the brain. These receptors influence pleasure, memory, thinking, concentration, sense of time and movement.

Marijuana can also be used for its medicinal effects, which are similar to those of prescription pain medicine. Many states have legalized marijuana for medical use and even adult recreational use.

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What are the consequences of using marijuana?

- The effects of marijuana vary depending on how it is consumed:
 - Within a few minutes of inhaling it, a person's heart rate speeds up, their airways relax and become enlarged and the blood vessels in the eyes expand, making the eyes look red.
 - After eating it, the effects are felt about an hour or two since THC has to be digested first. The effects of edibles can be more severe than other methods of consumption.
- THC over-activates brain cell receptors causing:
 - Changes in mood
 - Altered sense of time and senses (for example, seeing brighter colors)
 - Impaired memory or body movement
 - Difficulty thinking and problem-solving
 - Intense nausea and vomiting
 - Hallucinations and delusions (when taken in high doses)
- Marijuana can have a wide range of health effects from hallucinations to paranoia, breathing problems and possible harm to nursing infants and unborn babies.
- People who use marijuana can sometimes develop a substance use disorder (SUD), which means they cannot stop even if they really want to.

Where to get help.

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Methamphetamine (Meth)

Crystal | Speed | Crank | Chalk | Tina | Ice

What is Meth?

Meth stimulates a person's mood, increases movement, motivation, and energy and makes a person more alert. Meth can be swallowed, snorted, injected with a needle, or most commonly, smoked. Meth is chemically similar to amphetamine, a medication used to treat attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy.

Meth changes the way nerve cells or “neurons” in the brain communicate using chemicals called “neurotransmitters”; dopamine is such a neurotransmitter and its role in the brain is to communicate feelings of pleasure.

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What are the consequences of using Meth?

- Meth can raise a person's heartrate, temperature and blood pressure, narrows blood vessels making people more alert and active but can also cause death.
- Repeated use of meth disrupts the brain's natural pleasure or dopamine system, and people who use meth have a hard time feeling pleasure from normal activities.
 - After the high wears off, many people experience a "crash," a feeling of tired and sad, which causes them to continue using.
 - Continued use of Meth also leads to extreme weight loss, dental health problems, paranoia, anxiety, violent behavior, and trouble processing thoughts, emotions and memories.
- People who use meth often develop a tolerance and they must take more to get the same effect as before. Tolerance often leads to a substance use disorder (SUD) meaning that they cannot stop even if they really want to. A SUD does not only harm a person's health but also other parts of their life like school, work, relationships and family.
- People who inject meth are at higher risk of getting hepatitis C or HIV if they share infected needles.
- Meth use during pregnancy can also be harmful to the unborn baby.

Where to get help.

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Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS)

What is NOWS?

NOWS causes withdrawal symptoms in newborns whose mothers used opioids during pregnancy. Opioids include heroin, fentanyl, oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, morphine, and many other legal and illegal substances. Regular use of opioids can lead to dependence, substance use disorder (SUD), overdose, and death.

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What are symptoms of Nows?

Nows symptoms typically occur in the first few days of life and can last a few weeks such as extreme fussiness; difficulty feeding, gaining weight, and/or sleeping; seizures. Nows can affect a child's growth and development. The best way to prevent Nows is not using opioids while pregnant.

People who use prescription opioid medicines for a long period of time are at higher risk of becoming dependent on them, developing a substance use disorder (SUD), starting to use heroin and overdosing.

- An overdose is when a person's brain is overloaded with too much of an opioid, causing their breathing to become shallow or even stop and become unresponsive.
- Overdose symptoms include slowed or stopped breathing and/or heartbeat, blue lips and fingernails, cold and damp skin, shaking and inability to speak. Only a medication called Naloxone or Narcan® can save someone's life from death due to an opioid overdose.

Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) can help people to recovery successfully.

Where to get help.

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The logo for iknowmine.org is a red circle with the text "iknowmine" in white lowercase letters, and ".org" in smaller white lowercase letters below it.

Prescription Opioids (Pain Medication)

Oxy | Vikes | Percs | Pain Killers

Opioid medications are prescribed by medical professionals for pain relief. They have to be taken as prescribed to reduce pain safely.

What are opioids?

Opioids work similar to chemicals in the brain called endorphins. The human body also makes endorphins to relieve pain. Prescription Opioids are safe when used as directed by a doctor. Prescription opioids include fentanyl, oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, morphine, and many other legal substances. Opioid misuse means taking somebody else's prescription, taking more than prescribed, taking them to get high, or mixing them with other substances including alcohol.

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What are the consequences of using opioids?

- Prescription opioids affects the brain's "reward circuit." When opioids enter the brain, they bind to receptors involved in feelings of pain and pleasure. Opioids can also cause sleepiness, confusion, nausea or constipation.
- People who use prescription opioid medication for a long period of time are at higher risk of becoming dependent on them or developing a substance use disorder (SUD), which could lead to heroin use and even overdosing.
- An **overdose** is when a person's brain is overloaded with too much of an opioid, causing their breathing to become shallow or even stop and become unresponsive. Symptoms may include:
 - **Slowed or stopped breathing and/or heartbeat, Blue lips and fingernails, Cold and damp skin, Shaking and inability to speak**
- Only a medication called Naloxone or Narcan® can save someone's life from an opioid overdose.
- Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) can help people to recovery successfully.
- The effects of opioid misuse are most severe during pregnancy and until age 25 when the brain develops the most.

Where to get help.

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Spice

K2 | Fake Weed | Moon Rocks | Skunk | Black Mama | Bliss | Genie | Yucatan Fire | Bombay Blue

Spice is a mix of natural herbs and laboratory-made chemicals that cause mind-altering effects. Usually the chemicals are sprayed onto plant materials to make them look like marijuana.

What is Spice?

Spice is often called “synthetic marijuana” or “fake weed” because some of the chemicals in it are similar to the ones in marijuana. But, its effects are sometimes very different from marijuana, often much stronger and can cause death. Spice is often labeled with “not for human consumption” and disguised as incense. They come in colorful foil packages and plastic bottles. People smoke Spice by rolling it in papers like marijuana or tobacco cigarettes, drink it as an herbal tea or consume it as liquid in e-cigarettes. People smoke Spice by rolling it in papers like marijuana or tobacco cigarettes, drink it as an herbal tea or consume it as liquid in e-cigarettes.

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What are the consequences of using Spice?

- The chemicals found in Spice attach to the same nerve cell receptors as delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, the main mind-altering ingredient in marijuana. Several other unidentified chemicals in Spice make its effect on the brain and body unpredictable.
- People who use Spice experience similar effects as those from marijuana, but they also include:
 - Nausea and vomiting
 - Kidney damage
 - Extreme anxiety or nervousness
 - Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't there)
 - Confusion
 - Violent behavior
 - Suicidal thoughts
- Because Spice causes the heart to beat faster and blood pressure to go up, it can also lead to heart attack, seizures and death.
- The ingredients in Spice can change from batch to batch
- Spice can change the way the brain functions. People who use Spice can develop a **substance use disorder (SUD)**, which means they cannot stop even if they really want to. If they do they may have withdrawal symptoms like headaches, anxiety, depression and irritability.

Where to get help.

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Tobacco

Cigarettes | E-cigarettes | Dip or Chewing tobacco | Iqmik | Blackbull

Tobacco is a leafy plant grown around the world that is made into products to be smoked, vaped, snuffed, chewed, or dissolved. Iqmik or “Blackbull” is a homemade form of smokeless tobacco used mainly in the Southwest region of Alaska.

What is tobacco?

Tobacco contains the chemical nicotine that “hooks” a person. Tobacco is either burned through cigarettes or cigars, or absorbed through the mouth with dip or chew, or heated in liquid form through E-cigarettes. Iqmik or “Blackbull” is a mix of tobacco and a fungus that is absorbed through the mouth. In addition to tobacco, cigarettes contain more than 600 ingredients. When burned, cigarettes create more than 7,000 chemicals and many are toxic.

E-cigarettes include e-pens, e-pipes, e-hookahs, and e-cigars and are sometimes called “vapes” and “vape pens”. E-cigarettes heat e-liquid from a refillable cartridge, releasing a chemical-filled aerosol.

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What are the consequences of using tobacco?

- The nicotine in tobacco impacts the natural dopamine levels in the brain, or the “feel good” system. These good feelings wear off and cause people to want to smoke again and make it hard to quit using.
- Nicotine can increase someone’s blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing.
- Using tobacco of any form can harm several organs in the body. This can result in serious health issues like cancers, lung problems, heart disease and stroke, loss of smell and taste, cataracts (blurred vision), aging skin and teeth, risk to unborn babies, and fire-related deaths.
- Research shows that e-cigarettes (vaping) are just as harmful as smoking traditional cigarettes, especially for young people.
- Research also shows that using nicotine and tobacco products could act as “gateway drugs.” This means that people who use tobacco are more likely to use other substances.

Where to get help.

Ready to quit? Talk with your primary care provider about quitting options or contact the Alaska’s Tobacco Quit Line: **1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669)**

Talk with your primary care provider or visit www.alaska211.org.

For emergencies or someone to talk to call the Alaska Careline at **1-877-266-4357**.

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