

TEN QUESTIONS TEENAGERS ASK MOST ABOUT DRUGS — AND THEIR ANSWERS

1. How can you be sure that an illegal drug is pure?

You can't. That's what is scary. One drug may be mixed with another drug or even with things like Ajax or rat poison. You have no way of knowing what might have been added or how it was made.

2. Can you die from cocaine, crack or meth?

Yes. Each of these drugs constricts blood vessels and increases the heart rate, breathing rate, and blood pressure. People may die because cocaine, crack and meth force the heart and respiratory system to overwork. A single dose can cause a heart attack, stroke, or seizure.

3. Do most teenagers use drugs?

Most teenagers really don't use drugs. A nationwide study of middle grade through tenth grade students shows that most do not use tobacco, alcohol, marijuana or any form of illegal drugs.*

Teenagers say the reason they don't use alcohol and other drugs is because these substances are hard on their health. Teens say they can't perform in sports or school as well when they do drugs regularly - or even once in a while.

4. What happens when you mix alcohol with marijuana, sedatives or prescription painkillers?

Any time you mix two drugs, it is dangerous. The most dangerous combination is alcohol and sleeping pills or prescription painkillers. A person taking these drugs may stop breathing or have heart failure, or may choke to death on his or her own vomit. Alcohol and marijuana taken together can cause a person to become very disoriented and to have an even slower reaction time than if either drug were taken alone.

5. What is ecstasy?

Ecstasy is both a stimulant and a mild hallucinogen. Because ecstasy provides a surge of energy and suppresses thirst, it can raise body temperature and put a person at risk for seriously overheating their body (called hyperthermia), especially when using ecstasy at a dance club or all-night dance party. Body temperatures higher than 105° are a medical emergency and can cause death.

**National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).*

6. Which drugs are the most dangerous?

Drugs are dangerous in different ways:

- **Alcohol** is dangerous because it makes your judgment poor and can cause alcohol poisoning. Drinking and driving don't mix. Even one drink can affect your ability to drive safely.
- **Marijuana** is dangerous because it is psychologically addictive, distorts perceptions, and contributes to memory loss.
- **Nicotine** is dangerous because it is addictive. Smoking cigarettes can cause cancer, heart attack, or death.
- **Hallucinogens** are dangerous because they distort reality. A person taking LSD or shrooms (psychedelic mushrooms) may decide to step out of a third-story window because the ground looks so close or because the person thinks he or she can fly. LSD users may have flashbacks (re-experiencing hallucinations) months and even a year later. Ecstasy damages your judgment, making you vulnerable to sexual attack or other violence.
- **Sedatives** (prescription painkillers, sleeping pills, tranquilizers, heroin and opium) are dangerous because too much of any of these drugs may cause coma or death. Mixing sedatives with each other or with alcohol is particularly deadly.
- **Steroids** are dangerous because they can lead to depression and even suicide when people stop using them.
- **Stimulants** (methamphetamine, cocaine, ecstasy and prescription stimulants like Ritalin) are dangerous because they can cause stroke, seizure, heart attack, or death. Over time, people who take stimulants that weren't prescribed for them can suffer from malnutrition and become paranoid.

7. What can happen when you use drugs at a dance club or all-night dance party?

- **Overheating:** Because ecstasy both raises body temperature and suppresses thirst, it can cause your body to overheat (hyperthermia). Overheating destroys the body's temperature sensor. As a result, users' bodies don't recognize they are overheated and do not "turn on" ways to keep cool, such as sweating. A body temperature higher than 105° is a medical emergency.
- **Over-hydration:** Ecstasy users often drink a lot of liquids to prevent dehydration. However, they can drink too much, causing over-hydration, which dilutes the salt in the body to dangerous levels. This can cause brain failure, paralysis, and death.
- **Impaired judgment:** Ecstasy and meth can make you feel powerful and less inhibited. But these feelings can make you vulnerable to sexual attack.
- **Deadly combinations:** Illegal drugs often contain other ingredients such as rat poison or additional drugs. Users can't know exactly what they're taking, even if they get the pills from their "regular" dealer or use the "same" brand. Not knowing exactly what's in a club drug makes mixing them with alcohol or other drugs especially dangerous – it's random chemistry.

8. Why are toxic fumes so dangerous to inhale?

The fumes from toxic chemicals can kill you fast (heart stops, suffocation, accidents) or slowly (brain damage). They can also cause permanent injuries such as nerve or kidney damage, permanent paralysis or shaking, brain damage and loss of bladder control.

9. How can you tell whether a person is an alcoholic?

Alcoholism is a disease. A person who has it must have alcohol to feel mentally and physically okay. A person is an alcoholic if drinking interferes with his or her family, school, or social life. Of all the people who drink alcohol, one out of every ten will become an alcoholic.

No one knows for sure who is likely to become an alcoholic, but studies show that if you have a family member who is an alcoholic, you are more likely to become one yourself. Following are some signs that a person is addicted to alcohol:

- Drinking regularly to relieve shyness, fear, or anger.
- Drinking first thing in the morning.
- Drinking alone regularly.
- Having problems with school or work due to drinking.
- Needing a drink at a definite time every day.
- Having a loss of memory during or after drinking.
- Becoming more moody or irritable after drinking.

10. Are any drugs legal?

Almost all drugs that are not prescribed by doctors or available over the counter are illegal for teenagers. This includes alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana. In all states, alcohol is illegal for anyone under twenty-one years of age. It is also illegal in all states for teenagers under the age of 18 to buy cigarettes. With some exceptions, it is illegal for anyone to buy marijuana in all states. It is also illegal to possess cocaine, methamphetamine, ecstasy, LSD, heroin or opium.

Sleeping pills, steroids, stimulants and painkillers are legal by prescription only. Using drugs that are prescribed for someone else is like flipping a chemical coin. You don't know how much of the drug is in them or how your body and mind will react.

Smoking cigarettes or taking drugs violates rules in most schools.

Inhalants are not drugs. They are toxic substances that are legal when used for the purposes for which they were intended. When toxic chemicals are put up to your nose or mouth and inhaled to get high, they act like drugs, but are poisonous.