

Marijuana, Hallucinogens, and Inhalants

Marijuana, also sometimes referred to as pot, weed, grass, or reefer, can be either smoked or eaten. A more potent form of marijuana is hashish. Marijuana affects the brain's center for coordination and may make you slow to react. This can be dangerous, especially if you're riding a bike, skateboard, or driving a car. Many accidents happen when people are under the influence of marijuana because they are not as alert as usual.

One physical change brought on by marijuana is a faster heartbeat. While this change doesn't usually harm a healthy person, it can pose a serious problem for someone with heart disease. Marijuana smoking can also cause respiratory problems—much in the same way that cigarette smoking causes these problems. It's possible that smoking marijuana for a long enough period will even lead to lung cancer.

Hallucinogens

Hallucinogens include mushrooms and LSD (also known as acid). Ecstasy, which can also cause hallucinations, is actually a stimulant. Mushrooms and LSD are usually eaten or swallowed. People using these drugs may feel stimulated and excited or depressed and sluggish. Some people become violent or act strangely. They may have severe attacks of anxiety and panic and feel like they're losing control. This has often been referred to as having a "bad trip." It can last anywhere from a few minutes to several hours. In the case of LSD, sometimes people have "flashbacks" days or even months after having taken the drug, causing them to relive some part of the past LSD experience. Flashbacks are believed to be triggered by stress, anxiety, other drug use, or by some specific mental "cue" associated with a past LSD experience. An example of a cue would be a specific song or a specific smell.

Inhalants

Inhalants are chemicals that can be inhaled or "sniffed." These substances eventually work their way into the lungs where they are absorbed into the blood. The blood then carries these substances directly to the brain, heart, kidneys, and liver, where they affect the way these important organs work. Many children and teenagers inhale various household chemicals, such as glue, gasoline, paint, paint thinner, hair sprays, or spray deodorants. Sniffing inhalants slows down your reactions and may cause you to experience double vision or ringing in the ears. You may feel excited, numb, or dizzy. You may also start believing things that are not true or seeing or hearing things that are not really there. Long-term sniffing can seriously damage the brain, heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, and nerves.

The best way to prevent problems with drugs is simply not to use them. If you're under stress, don't take drugs to deal with your problems. Instead, try to understand and resolve the sources of your depression, anxiety, or loneliness.

If you already have a problem with drugs, consider joining a self-help group of people with similar problems. If you're concerned about another person's drug use, don't ignore it. Think of it as a medical problem and offer to make a phone call or an appointment for help. One option is to call Kaiser Permanente's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program for confidential treatment. You can also call the National Institute of Drug Abuse hotline at 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357).

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For more health information ...

- Connect to our Web site at *members.kp.org*
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor.