



Drugs – Facts and Fictions



“Many young people who start taking drugs don’t realise what they are getting into. There are lots of myths about drugtaking. Before you do anything rash, it’s worth knowing all the facts and what risks are involved.”
– *Drugs counsellor*

~~Fact or Fiction~~

Only other people get hooked or hurt by drugs

Part of the problem with drugs is that most users think they’re invincible. They believe that the dangers will never affect them because it’s other people who end up being rushed to hospital, other people who can’t handle the effects of drugs.

If you’re someone who is tempted to take drugs, don’t ignore the information and warnings. Drugs can and do kill. They don’t discriminate – it could happen to anyone.

~~Fact or Fiction~~

People get their drugs from pushers

Contrary to popular belief, most people come into contact with drugs through friends and older sisters or brothers, not through anonymous pushers on the street. What’s more, being approached by someone you like makes saying no harder and more complicated.

Fact or Fiction

All drugs are dangerous

The danger when taking drugs depends on many things, such as *what* you’ve taken, *how much* you’ve taken, and your state of mind at the time. Although some drugs are less dangerous than others, illegally manufactured drugs are *always* a danger because it’s impossible to tell what’s in them. Never trust a friend who tells you something is safe

because they’ve tried it. Everyone reacts differently to drugs – body size, weight, age and sex all need to be taken into account.

~~Fact or Fiction~~

Soft drugs lead to hard drugs

One of the greatest myths of all time is that taking soft drugs automatically means you’ll end up on hard drugs. There is no evidence to suggest that this is true, although taking any kind of drug does increase your chances of coming into contact with harder drugs. This is because drugs like Ecstasy, Speed and LSD are often mixed with other substances, and are often available through the same sources. What you have to remember with drugs is that you always have a choice. A choice not to take them, a choice to stop taking them and a choice not to go any further.

Is Cannabis Safe?

You may have heard people say cannabis is risk free. This isn’t true.

- Heavy use of cannabis over a long period of time can lead to users relying on the drug as a way of relaxing and being sociable.
- Heavy, long-term cannabis use can make you feel less energetic than normal. This can have a

negative effect on the way you live your life.

- Smoking cannabis with tobacco causes lung damage. In fact it’s reckoned that smoke from an unfiltered spliff carries more risks than a cigarette. However, people tend to smoke many more cigarettes than spliffs.

ECSTASY FACTFILE

Name: The chemical name for ecstasy is MDMA.

Form: Ecstasy comes as tablets of different shapes, sizes and colours. Because it can look like many other drugs or medicines, a lot of people have been sold tablets which have turned out not to be ecstasy. Since you can never be quite sure what you are buying, a lot of people think buying ecstasy isn’t worth the risk.

Legal category: Ecstasy is a Class A drug. It is illegal to possess or supply ecstasy.

Effects: Ecstasy is a stimulant which users say gives them a ‘rush’ feeling followed by a sense of calm, making them feel closer to other people and more aware of their surroundings. They get an energy buzz, which means they can dance for long periods. The effects begin about 20 minutes after they’ve taken a tablet and last for several hours.

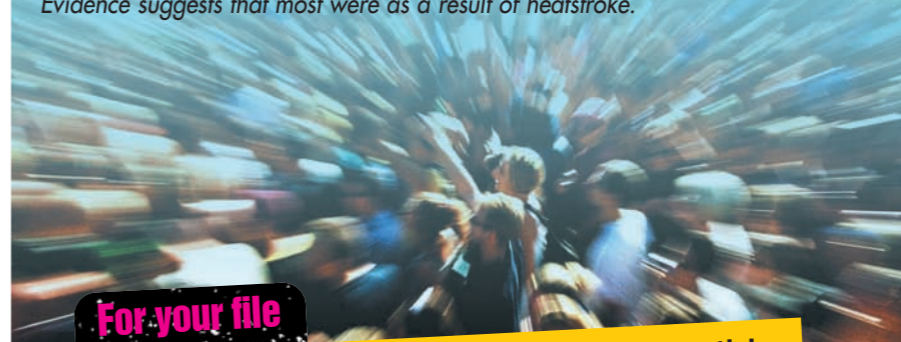
Risks: As ecstasy starts to work people sometimes feel sick, their heart rate increases and their jaw muscles tighten. Some people become anxious and feel confused and frightened.

Ecstasy raises the body’s temperature. Dancing for a long time in a hot atmosphere after taking ecstasy can lead to overheating and dehydration (loss of too much body fluid). The risks can be reduced by ‘chilling out’ and taking regular breaks from dancing, and by drinking about a pint of a non-alcoholic fluid, such as water, fruit juice or a sports drink every hour. Users are advised to sip the drink regularly, to avoid alcohol and to eat salty food in order to replace the sodium they have lost through sweating.

Once the effects of the ecstasy wear off, users can feel tired and depressed, but may find it hard to sleep.

Research into the long-term effects of using ecstasy suggest that heavy use may cause damage to the brain, leading to depression and memory loss later in life. Use of ecstasy has also been linked to liver and kidney problems.

There have been around 50 deaths a year as a result of taking ecstasy. Evidence suggests that most were as a result of heatstroke.



For your file

Use the information on this page and write an article for a teenage magazine entitled ‘Ecstasy – is it worth the risk?’ Explain what physical effects ecstasy has – both pleasurable and harmful – and give your views on the risks involved in taking ecstasy.

In groups

What do you learn from these pages about the risks of drugtaking? Discuss the views of these young people (below) and say why you agree or disagree with them.

‘Experimenting with drugs is too risky. You don’t know what you’re taking and how your body will react.’

‘There’s too much fuss about drugtaking. Most people who take drugs get a good feeling and it doesn’t do them any harm.’

‘Taking drugs is a waste of money. You don’t need drugs in order to have a good time.’

In pairs

Study the article on ecstasy. Make a list of the important facts about ecstasy which you learn from the article.

Role play

Act out a situation in which a doctor explains to a teenager the risks involved in taking ecstasy and smoking cannabis.

Role play a scene in which two people argue about the risks of drugtaking – one saying it’s worth the risk, the other saying it’s not. Take it in turns to be the person saying it’s not worth the risk.





Drugs and the Law

If the police have reason to suspect you're carrying an illegal drug they have the right to make you turn out your pockets. They can also take you to the police station and search you. If drugs are found, you could be charged with one of TWO offences.



1 Possession

This means being caught with an illegal drug for your own use. The police can tell your parents or carer. They could also inform the Social Services and the Probation Service. As for punishment, the police can give you either a reprimand, a warning or prosecute you (see page 39). If you are found guilty in court you can get a fine or a custodial sentence.

2 Possession with intent to supply drugs

If you had any intention of dealing (which can include giving and sharing drugs) you may be charged with this more serious offence. Decisions over whether you're charged with intent to supply are based on the circumstances in which you were caught and the quantity of drugs you were caught with. The police can take the same course of action as in simple possession cases, but this time you're more likely to be charged. If your case goes to court the penalties are likely to be heavier.

If you have a drugs record:

Obtaining a visa to travel to some countries may become difficult or could even be denied. It could affect your job prospects. When you're applying for a job, an employer may check if you have a criminal record or any past convictions. *Ignorance won't wash with the law.* The Misuse of Drugs Act divides drugs into three classes and gives guidance for penalties.

Class A

cocaine, crack, ecstasy, heroin, LSD (acid), magic mushrooms prepared for use, speed (amphetamines) if prepared for injection

Maximum Penalties:

- **possession:** 7 years' prison and/or unlimited fine
- **supply:** life imprisonment and/or unlimited fine

Class B

cannabis, speed (amphetamines)

Maximum Penalties:

- **possession:** 5 years' prison and/or unlimited fine
- **supply:** 14 years' prison and/or unlimited fine

Class C

rohypnol, supply of anabolic steroids and tranquillisers/possession of temazepam (mazzies)

Maximum Penalties:

- **possession:** 2 years' prison and/or unlimited fine
- **supply:** 14 years' prison and/or unlimited fine

In groups

Discuss what you learn from this page about the laws on drugs.

- 1 What can the police do if they think you are carrying drugs?
- 2 What offences could the police charge you with if you are caught carrying drugs?
- 3 Into what different classes does the law divide illegal drugs? How do the maximum sentences differ according to which class a drug is in?

- 4 What can be the consequences of having a drugs record?
- 5 How effective do you think the current drugs laws are? Do you think they act as a deterrent? What effect do you think they have on the way drugtakers obtain and use drugs?
- 6 Do you think the drugs laws should be changed in any way?

Should there be harsher penalties for supplying drugs? What are the arguments for and against making drug use legal and allowing people to possess drugs in small amounts for their own personal use?

For your file

Write a statement giving your views on the drugs laws.

Saying 'no' to drugs

In groups

Talk about all the different situations in which a teenager might be offered drugs. Why might they choose to refuse or accept? Talk about factors that might influence their decision, such as where they are, who they are with, what mood they are in and how much pressure is put on them to join in.

Discuss the advice which the extract gives on how to turn down drugs and stay friends. Which piece of advice do you think is the most helpful?

Role play

Role play a scene in which a teenager is being offered drugs and a group of their friends is putting pressure on them to accept. Discuss various tactics that the teenager can use in order to say no. Is it best to just say no and walk away? To state clearly the reasons why you personally don't want to take them? To argue with the people who are offering them to you, and try to stop them taking any?

Take it in turns to be the person being pressurised, and discuss which of the tactics worked most successfully.

How to turn down drugs and stay friends

- ▶ Say no and don't feel bad about it. Obsessing about what you've said, how you've said it, and what people think of you is bad news.
- ▶ Being the only non drug-taker may feel awkward and uncomfortable but this is just a phase and, like all awkward phases, it will pass.
- ▶ Don't make things worse for yourself by letting your imagination exaggerate a situation. Being the odd one out is hard but it doesn't mean your friends no longer like you.

“ When I refused to smoke drugs at a party, I thought all my friends thought I was being stupid. I got so upset about it that I went home early and cried. Over the weekend I decided that if they didn't like me for not taking drugs, I wasn't going to be friends with them any more. When I got to school on Monday, I was all ready to fight with them but then I found out they were all worried about me and had no idea why I'd got so upset. ”

- ▶ Strange, but true, no one is judging you.
- ▶ Everyone is so worried about themselves and how they look to other people that they aren't even thinking about you.
- ▶ Question people who try to bully you into taking drugs. After all, if drugs are so brilliant, why is it so necessary for them to have your company? If someone is giving you grief for saying no, ask them the following:
 - ➔ Why is it so important for you to take them?
 - ➔ Why are they so stressed out about you saying no?
 - ➔ Why do they have to make other people take them too?

