

# IS YOUR TEEN USING? SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

There's no easy way to figure out if your teen is using drugs or alcohol. As you'll see, many of the signs and symptoms of teen substance abuse listed below are also, at times, typical adolescent behavior. Many are also symptoms of mental health issues, including depression or anxiety disorders.

If you've noticed any of the changes related to substance abuse listed below, don't be afraid to come right out and ask your teen direct questions like "Have you been offered drugs?" If yes, "What did you do?" or "Have you been drinking or using drugs?" While no parent wants to hear a "yes" response to these questions, be prepared for it. Decide, in advance, how you'll respond to a "yes". Make sure you reassure your child that you're looking out for him or her, and that you only want the best for his or her future.

Of course, not all teens are going to fess up to drug or alcohol use, and a "no" could also mean your child is in need of help for mental health issues. That's why experts strongly recommend that you consider getting a professional assessment of your child with a pediatrician or child psychologist to find out what's going on. In the case of teen substance abuse, don't be afraid to err on the side of caution. Teaming up with professionals to help your teen is the best way to make sure he or she has a healthy future.

## **Personal Appearance**

- Messy, shows lack of caring for appearance
- Poor hygiene
- Red, flushed cheeks or face
- Track marks on arms or legs (or long sleeves in warm weather to hide marks)
- Burns or soot on fingers or lips (from "joints" or "roaches" burning down)

## **Personal Habits or Actions**

- Clenching teeth
- Smell of smoke or other unusual smells on breath or on clothes
- Chewing gum or mints to cover up breath

- Heavy use of over-the-counter preparations to reduce eye reddening, nasal irritation, or bad breath
- Frequently breaks curfew
- Cash flow problems
- Reckless driving, car accidents, or unexplained dents in the car
- Avoiding eye contact
- Locked doors
- Going out every night
- Secretive phone calls
- "Munchies" or sudden appetite

### **Behavioral Issues Associated with Teen Substance Abuse**

- Change in relationships with family members or friends
- Loss of inhibitions
- Mood changes or emotional instability
- Loud, obnoxious behavior
- Laughing at nothing
- Unusually clumsy, stumbling, lack of coordination, poor balance
- Sullen, withdrawn, depressed
- Unusually tired
- Silent, uncommunicative
- Hostility, anger, uncooperative behavior
- Deceitful or secretive
- Makes endless excuses
- Decreased Motivation
- Lethargic movement
- Unable to speak intelligibly, slurred speech, or rapid-fire speech
- Inability to focus
- Hyperactivity
- Unusually elated
- Periods of sleeplessness or high energy, followed by long periods of "catch up" sleep
- Disappearances for long periods of time

### **School- or Work-Related Issues**

- Truancy or loss of interest in schoolwork

- Loss of interest in extracurricular activities, hobbies, or sports
- Failure to fulfill responsibilities at school or work
- Complaints from teachers or co-workers
- Reports of intoxication at school or work

## **Health Issues Related to Teen Substance Abuse**

- Nosebleeds
- Runny nose, not caused by allergies or a cold
- Frequent sickness
- Sores, spots around mouth
- Queasy, nauseous
- Seizures
- Vomiting
- Wetting lips or excessive thirst (known as "cotton mouth")
- Sudden or dramatic weight loss or gain
- Skin abrasions/bruises
- Accidents or injuries
- Depression
- Headaches
- Sweatiness

## **Home- or Car-Related**

- Disappearance of prescription or over-the-counter pills
- Missing alcohol or cigarettes
- Disappearance of money or valuables
- Smell in the car or bottles, pipes, or bongs on floor or in glove box
- Appearance of unusual containers or wrappers, or seeds left on surfaces used to clean marijuana, like Frisbees,
- Appearance of unusual drug apparatuses, including pipes, rolling papers, small medicine bottles, eye drops, butane lighters, or makeshift smoking devices, like bongs made out of toilet paper rolls and aluminum foil
- Hidden stashes of alcohol

## Heroin

An opioid drug made from morphine, a natural substance extracted from the seed pod of the Asian opium poppy plant. For more information, see the [Heroin Research Report](#).

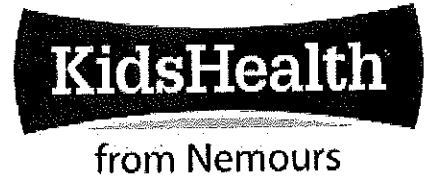
Street Names	Commercial Names	Common Forms	Common Ways Taken	DEA Schedule
Brown sugar, China White, Dope, H, Horse, Junk, Skag, Skunk, Smack, White Horse <i>With OTC cold medicine and antihistamine: Cheese</i>	No commercial uses	White or brownish powder, or black sticky substance known as "black tar heroin"	Injected, smoked, snorted	I

### Possible Health Effects

Short-term	Euphoria; warm flushing of skin; dry mouth; heavy feeling in the hands and feet; clouded thinking; alternate wakeful and drowsy states; itching; nausea; vomiting; slowed breathing and heart rate.
Long-term	Collapsed veins; abscesses (swollen tissue with pus); infection of the lining and valves in the heart; constipation and stomach cramps; liver or kidney disease; pneumonia.
Other Health-related Issues	Pregnancy: miscarriage, low birth weight, neonatal abstinence syndrome.  Risk of HIV, hepatitis, and other infectious diseases from shared needles.
In Combination with Alcohol	Dangerous slowdown of heart rate and breathing, coma, death.
Withdrawal Symptoms	Restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, cold flashes with goose bumps ("cold turkey"), leg movements.

**KidsHealth.org**

The most-visited site  
devoted to children's  
health and development



## Talking to Your Child About Drugs

Just as you protect your kids against illnesses like measles, you can help "immunize" them against drug use by giving them the facts before they're in a risky situation.

When kids don't feel comfortable talking to parents, they'll seek answers elsewhere, even if their sources are unreliable. And kids who aren't properly informed are at greater risk of engaging in unsafe behaviors and experimenting with drugs.

Parents who are educated about the effects of drug use and learn the facts can give their kids correct information and clear up any misconceptions. You're a role model for your kids, and your views on alcohol, tobacco, and drugs can strongly influence how they think about them. So make talking about drugs a part of your general health and safety conversations.

### **Preschool to Age 7**

Before you get nervous about talking to young kids, take heart. You've probably already laid the groundwork for a discussion. For instance, whenever you give a fever medicine or an antibiotic to your child, you can discuss why and when these medicines should be given. This is also a time when your child is likely to pay attention to your behavior and guidance.

Take advantage of "teachable moments" now. If you see a character in a movie or on TV with a cigarette, talk about smoking, nicotine addiction, and what smoking does to a person's body. This can lead into a discussion about other drugs and how they could cause harm.

Keep the tone of these discussions calm and use terms that your child can understand. Be specific about the effects of the drugs: how they make a person feel, the risk of overdose, and the other long-term damage they can cause. To give your kids these facts, you might have to do a little research.

### **Ages 8 to 12**

As your kids grow older, you can begin talks with them by asking them what they think about drugs. By asking the questions in a nonjudgmental, open-ended way, you're more likely to get an honest response.

Remember to show your kids that you're listening and really paying attention to their concerns and questions.

Kids this age usually are still willing to talk openly to their parents about touchy subjects. Starting a dialogue now helps keep the door open as kids get older and are less inclined to share their thoughts and feelings.

Even if your questions don't immediately result in a discussion, you'll get your kids thinking about the issue. Show them that you're willing to discuss the topic and hear what they have to say. Then, they might be more willing to come to you for help in the future.

News, such as steroid use in professional sports, can be springboards for casual conversations about current events. Use these discussions to give your kids information about the risks of drugs.

### **Ages 13 to 17**

Kids this age are likely to know other kids who use alcohol or drugs, and to have friends who drive. Many are still willing to express their thoughts or concerns with parents about it. They may ask you more specific questions about drugs.

Use these conversations not only to understand your child's thoughts and feelings, but also to talk about the dangers of driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Talk about the legal issues — jail time and fines — and the possibility that they or someone else might be killed or seriously injured.

Consider making a written or verbal contract on the rules about going out or using the car. You can promise to pick your kids up at any time (even 2 a.m.!), no questions asked, if they call you when the person responsible for driving has been drinking or using drugs.

The contract also can detail other situations: For example, if you find out that someone drank or used drugs in your car while your son or daughter was behind the wheel, you may want to suspend driving privileges for 6 months. By discussing all of this with your kids from the start, you eliminate surprises and make your expectations clear.

### **Laying Good Groundwork**

No parent, child, or family is immune to the effects of drugs. Any kid can end up in trouble, even those who have made an effort to avoid it and even when they have been given the proper guidance from their parents.

However, certain groups of kids may be more likely to use drugs than others. Kids who have friends who use drugs are likely to try drugs themselves. Those feeling socially isolated for whatever reason may turn to drugs.

So it's important to know your child's friends — and their parents. Be involved in your children's lives. If your child's school runs an anti-drug program, get involved. You might learn something! Pay attention to how your kids are feeling and let them know that you're available and willing to listen in a nonjudgmental way. Recognize when your kids are going through difficult times so that you can provide the support they need or seek additional care if it's needed.

Role-playing can help your child develop strategies to turn down drugs if they are offered. Act out possible scenarios they may encounter. Helping them construct phrases and responses to say no prepares them to know how to respond before they are even in that situation.

A warm, open family environment — where kids can talk about their feelings, where their achievements are praised, and where their self-esteem is boosted — encourages kids to come forward with their questions and concerns. When censored in their own homes, kids go elsewhere to find support and answers to their most important questions.

Make talking and having conversations with your kids a regular part of your day. Finding time to do things you enjoy together as a family helps everyone stay connected and maintain open communication.

If you are looking for more resources for yourself or your child, be sure to also talk to your doctor.

Reviewed by: Rupal Christine Gupta, MD

Date reviewed: November 2014

Nemours.

Note: All information on KidsHealth® is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

© 1995- 2015 The Nemours Foundation. All rights reserved.

Images provided by The Nemours Foundation, iStock, Getty Images, Corbis, Veer, Science Photo Library, Science Source Images, Shutterstock, and Clipart.com



THE PARTNERSHIP  
AT DRUGFREE.ORG

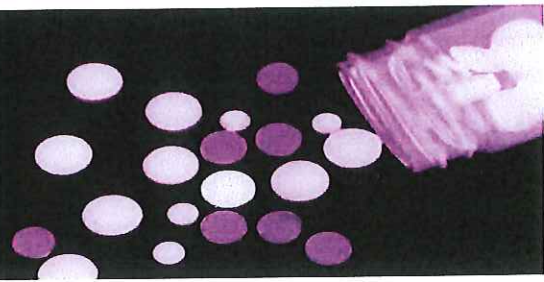
Teens will be teens. They sleep late, fail a test here and there or get uncharacteristically moody. But what if these behaviors are happening more often than usual, or all at the same time? You know your teen better than anyone, but it is important to know what to look for if you suspect he or she may be abusing medicine.

1. **Health concerns.** Keep an eye out for changes in your teen's physical health, like constricted pupils, nausea or vomiting, flushed skin or dizziness. Look further into anything that seems strange.
2. **Changes in behavior.** The signs of medicine abuse aren't always physical. Look for changes in behavior – like sudden changes in relationships with their family or friends, anxiety, erratic mood swings or decreased motivation. It's no secret that teens can be moody, but be on the lookout for drastic differences in the way your child behaves.
3. **Home-related signs.** If you've noticed belongings disappearing around the house, or found some unusual objects appearing – like straws, burnt spoons, aluminum foil or medicine bottles – this could be a sign of medicine abuse. Count – and lock up – the medicine you have in your home and safely dispose of any expired medicine.
4. **Trouble in school.** Take note of how your teen is doing in school, including any change in homework habits and grades. A rapid drop in grades, loss of interest in schoolwork and complaints from teachers could be indicators that there's a problem.
5. **Things just seem off.** You know your child better than anyone and you know when something's not right. Trust your gut, and talk to your teen about your concerns.

With one in four kids reporting abuse of prescription drugs in their lifetime, it's important to take action right away if you do suspect medicine abuse. Don't be afraid to talk – and listen – to your teen, work through things together and get help if necessary.



# Prescription Drug ABUSE



Prescription drugs can provide much-needed benefits when used under the instruction of a healthcare provider. Used incorrectly though, prescription drugs can be extremely harmful to your body, and even deadly. A number of myths are out there surrounding prescription drugs. It's time to hear the facts.



**Myth:** Prescription drugs are safer to use than illicit drugs because they are legal.

**Fact:** When misused, prescription drugs are just as dangerous as any illicit drug.

**Myth:** Prescription drugs produce a "safe high."

**Fact:** There is no such thing as a "safe high." Getting high on any drug is dangerous.

**Myth:** Prescription drugs won't lead to addiction.

**Fact:** Many prescription drugs are highly addictive when used improperly.

**Myth:** Over-the-counter drugs are safe to use in high doses.

**Fact:** Abusing over-the-counter drugs is highly dangerous. There are chemicals that can hurt your body or cause death if used improperly.

**Myth:** Getting caught abusing prescription drugs won't result in serious consequences.

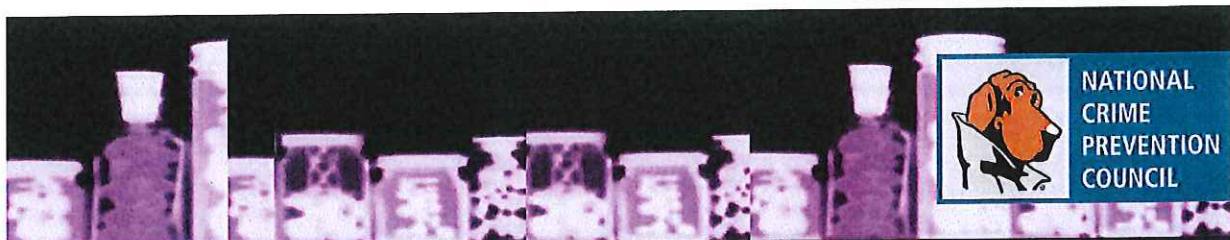
**Fact:** Abusing any type of drug is wrong and can lead to serious consequences, such as arrest, or expulsion from school or sports.

## Ways To Cope

If you think taking prescription drugs is an easy way to deal with stress, or will help you to feel better, know that there are safe and healthy things out there you can do instead:

- Take a long walk.
- Go for a drive (if you have your license).
- Sign up for a yoga or meditation class.
- Get lost in a good book.
- Talk with a friend or someone you trust about how you're feeling.
- Rent a good movie, make some popcorn, and invite a friend over.

Visit [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com) for more information.



NATIONAL  
CRIME  
PREVENTION  
COUNCIL

## DANGERS OF MARIJUANA EDIBLES:



**Is eating marijuana more dangerous than smoking marijuana?**

***YES! There is high potential for overdose from marijuana edibles.***

- The effects from smoking marijuana only takes minutes. Edibles, however, take between 1-3 hours because food is absorbed into the bloodstream through the liver. Because it takes longer, the user may end up consuming longer amounts of the drug while thinking the drug isn't working.
- The amount of THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, is very difficult to measure and is often unknown in these food products.
- If the user has other medications in his or her system, their body may metabolize different amounts of THC, causing THC levels in the bloodstream to dangerously increase five-fold.
- Overdose symptoms from eating marijuana are often more severe than symptoms of an overdose from smoking marijuana.

**What are the negative effects of marijuana edibles?**

- Psychotic episodes
- Hallucinations
- Paranoia
- Panic attacks
- Impaired motor ability

**Are marijuana edibles frequently used?**

Among 12th graders who used marijuana in the past year, 40% reported having consumed it in edible form in medical marijuana states, versus 26% in non-medical marijuana states.