



March 20 – 26, 2023 is National Drug
and Alcohol Facts Week®

Teen alcohol and drug use

National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week® is an annual health observance aimed at teenagers. The goal is to dispel myths about drug and alcohol use.

What is teen substance misuse?

Many teens try alcohol, tobacco, or drugs. Some teens try substances such as alcohol or drugs only a few times and stop. Others can't control their urges or cravings for them. This can lead to a substance use disorder.

Teens may try several substances. These may include cigarettes, alcohol, household chemicals (inhalants), prescription and over-the-counter medicines and illegal drugs.

Why do teens use drugs and alcohol?

Teens may use alcohol or other substances for many reasons. For example, they may do it because they:

- Want to fit in with friends or certain groups.
- Believe it makes them more grown up.
- Like the way it makes them feel.
- Want to escape problems.

Teens tend to try new things and take risks, so they may take drugs or drink alcohol because it seems exciting.

What problems can teen substance misuse cause?

Substance misuse can lead to long-term social and health problems, injury, and even death. For example:

- Alcohol and drug use is a leading cause of teen death or injury related to car crashes, suicides, violence and drowning.
- Substance misuse can lead to unprotected sex. This increases the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.
- Even occasional alcohol use by a teen increases the risk for future alcohol and drug use.
- Tobacco use can cause cancer and heart and lung problems.
- Substance misuse can affect growth and development. Teens who use alcohol and drugs may have trouble finding their identity, building relationships and preparing for their future.
- Even casual use of certain drugs can cause severe health problems, such as an overdose or brain damage. Many illegal drugs are made in home labs, so they may contain bacteria and other unsafe substances.
- Substance misuse can affect memory and learning.

What are the signs of substance misuse?

Sometimes it's hard to tell if a teen is using alcohol or drugs. Experts recommend that parents look for a **pattern or several changes** in appearance, behavior and attitude, not just one or two of the changes listed here.

Signs that a teen may be using substances include a:

Change in appearance.

Examples include:

- Less attention paid to dressing and grooming.
- Loss of appetite or unexplained weight loss.
- Red and glassy eyes, and frequent use of eyedrops and breath mints.
- "Track marks" where drugs have been injected into veins.

Change in behavior.

Examples include:

- Decreased attendance and performance at school.
- Loss of interest in school, sports, or other activities.
- Repeated health complaints, such as being overly tired.
- Newly developed secrecy, or deceptive or sneaky behavior.
- Withdrawal from family and friends.
- New friends and reluctance to introduce them.
- Lying or stealing.

Change in attitude.

Examples include:

- Disrespectful behavior.
- A mood or attitude that is getting worse.
- Lack of concern about the future.

What can you do if you think your teen is using substances?

If your teen is using alcohol, tobacco, or other substances, take it seriously. One of the most important things you can do is to talk openly with your teen about the problem. Urge your teen to be open too.

Try not to use harsh, judging words. In most cases, an angry face-to-face meeting will push a teen away. Be as supportive as you can during this time.

If you don't know what to do or if you don't feel comfortable, ask for help. Talk to your teen's doctor, a pediatrician, a psychologist or a psychiatrist.

What type of treatment can help a teen who is using substances?

The type of treatment your teen needs will depend on how bad your teen's substance misuse is.

If your teen:

- Experiments with substances, then education through a school or community program may be all your teen needs. Some schools have programs that provide support and substance misuse education.
- Uses a substance at least weekly, then some form of treatment is usually needed. Treatment helps motivate the teen to stop using substances and to learn skills to refuse drugs in the future. Family counseling may also be a part of treatment.
- Has a substance misuse disorder, then treatment in a structured program is needed. And your teen may need medical help for withdrawal symptoms.

If your teen is using tobacco, your teen can get help to quit. Talk to your doctor. Medicines and support can help your teen succeed.

Can teen substance misuse be prevented?

Teens who don't use alcohol or other substances are less likely to use them as adults. Efforts to prevent teen substance misuse should start early in life. Ideally, your doctor should start asking about your child's attitudes toward substances in grade school and continue the discussion over time.

To help prevent substance misuse:

- Talk to your child from a young age about what you expect. If your teen thinks that you'll allow substance misuse, your teen is more likely to try drugs or alcohol.
- Keep your teen busy with meaningful activities, such as sports or other group activities.
- Expect your teen to follow household rules. Set reasonable consequences for behavior that needs to change. Then consistently carry out the consequences.
- Keep talking with your teen. Praise your teen for successes.
- Know your child's friends. Having friends who avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs may be the best protection from substance misuse.

Visit your member website for more information.