

Adolescent Substance Use

The National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens states that many adolescents experiment with illegal drugs and alcohol. While experimentation is common among this age group, they are also more prone to developing addictions to alcohol and drugs. The most commonly-used substances among adolescents are alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and prescription or over-the-counter medications.

Know the Signs

Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs can cause addiction and other long-lasting health consequences. It's difficult for teens to understand the dangers of substance use because the obvious side effects can disappear after a few hours. But the long-term effects of using these substances occur slowly and increase with repeated use. Adolescents using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs might:

- Have a change in personality or attitude
- Neglect responsibilities
- Have a sudden change in friends or places they spend time
- Withdraw from typical social activities or important events
- Have a significant change in sleeping or eating patterns

Most Abused Substances

- **Alcohol-** Alcohol is the most common substance of abuse among adolescents in the United States. Underage drinking significantly increases the risk of injuries and death because it alters decision making skills and judgment of risk.
- **Tobacco –** Tobacco use is on the rise among adolescents due to the popularity of JUUL vaping devices and e-cigarettes. Nicotine is addictive, and vaping devices contain more nicotine than regular cigarettes. Vaping has also been shown to cause lung damage.
- **Marijuana-** Learning, memory, coordination, and judgment are all negatively affected after using marijuana. Marijuana also increases the risk for mental health problems, respiratory problems, and low birth weight.
- **Prescription & Over-the-Counter Medications-** Adolescents typically believe that using prescription drugs, such as Adderall or Vicodin, is safe because they are prescribed by a physician. Over-the-counter medications, like cough or cold medicines, are used recreationally but can alter brain chemistry when abused.

How to Help

Positive involvement and influence in an adolescent's life is a great way to keep them from using and abusing drugs, tobacco or alcohol, as well as teaching them how to say no. Rehabilitation centers employ trained medical professionals who create treatment plans to meet the specific needs of adolescents. Completing treatment can help an individual overcome substance abuse and find healthy ways to enjoy a life without drugs, tobacco or alcohol. For more youth substance use prevention resources, contact New Vista at prevention@newvista.org.

Sources - The National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens: <https://teens.drugabuse.gov>