

The effects of psychoactive drugs

Please note that effects of drugs depend on the many factors including the dose, the person and the environment. Individuals may show some or all of these signs and symptoms.

Drug	Common forms	Potential short-term effects (dose related)	Potential long-term complications	Withdrawal signs and symptoms
<p>DEPRESSANTS (slow down the central nervous system)</p> <p>Generic effects may include: relaxation, lowered level of consciousness, lowered blood pressure, decreased respiratory rate, impaired coordination, dulled reflexes, drowsiness dependence, financial social and relationship problems</p>				
<p>1. Sedatives/hypnotics</p>				
<p>Ethyl alcohol, ethanol (grog, piss, booze)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beer • wine • spirits • alcopops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feelings of euphoria, happiness and wellbeing • slurred speech • disinhibition, impaired judgement • confusion • dry mouth • mood swings • nausea and vomiting • coma, death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brain and other nervous system damage • cardiac disorders • pancreas, stomach, liver and other gastro-intestinal damage and disease • malnutrition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hangover • sweating • tremor • insomnia • nausea and vomiting • delusions and hallucinations • seizures • delirium tremens (rare)

Drug	Common forms	Potential short-term effects (dose related)	Potential long-term complications	Withdrawal signs and symptoms
Benzodiazepines (minor tranquilisers - sleepers, tranx, benzos)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chlordiazepoxide (Librium) • diazepam (Valium, Vs, Ducene, Propam, Atenex) • nitrazepam (Mogadon, moggies, Alodorm, Dormicum, Nitepam) • oxazepam (Serepax, seras, Benzotran, Murelax, Alepam) • flunitrazepam (Rohypnol, rowies) • temazepam (Euhypnos, Normison, footballs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effects can last 4 -100 hrs • relief of anxiety • blurred vision • slurred speech • lack of control of pupils/ gaze • drooling • dilated pupils • in some cases excitability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continued heavy use may cause depression or excitability • blackouts (short term memory loss) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anxiety • depression • insomnia • tremor • convulsions/ seizures • perceptual disorders • cramps
Solvents (inhalants, volatile substances)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fuels (eg, petrol) • glue • paint • propellants • aerosols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • euphoria and exhilaration • agitation and irritability • headache • disinhibition • delusions, hallucinations • confusion, disorientation • cardiac arrhythmias, chest pain • nausea, vomiting • loss of appetite • abdominal pain • dilated pupils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nervous system damage • loss of hearing and sense of smell • weight loss • sores on face • blood disorders • mental impairment • organ damage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anxiety • headache • nausea • dizziness • abdominal pains • cramps

Drug	Common forms	Potential short-term effects (dose related)	Potential long-term complications	Withdrawal signs and symptoms
Gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB, fantasy, grievous bodily harm, liquid ecstasy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • liquid • powder • capsules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effects last about 1½ hours • similar to alcohol • decreased motor skills • dizziness • loss of anxiety, euphoria • disinhibition, increased confidence & sociability • enhanced sense of touch • deep sleep, respiratory arrest, coma, cardiac arrest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not yet known 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not yet known
Barbiturates	Presently rarely used			
Non – barbiturates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chloral hydrate (Dormel) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As for benzodiazepines 		
2. Cannabis (in low doses)				
grass, dope, hooch, green, skunk, space cabbage, wacky backy, weed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leaf • heads • hashish • hashish oil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can last up to 5 hours, longer if taken orally • increased appetite • euphoria and exhilaration • distortion of perception of time, body image and distance • dilated blood vessels • altered visual, auditory and tactile perceptions • impairment of memory, concentration and processing • fearfulness, anxiety and paranoia • increased pulse rate, temperature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respiratory complications • can decrease concentration and memory • hormonal changes • increased risk of psychiatric problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insomnia • hypersensitivity • cravings • nightmares • anxiety

Drug	Common forms	Potential short-term effects (dose related)	Potential long-term complications	Withdrawal signs and symptoms
3. Opiate analgesics				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opium • morphine • codeine • heroin (H, junk, scag, shit, smack) • pethidine • dextropropoxyphene (Doloxene, dollies) • methadone (Physeptone, tablet form of methadone, 'done) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • heroin lasts 4-6 hrs; some opiates can last up to 36 hrs • relief of pain and anxiety • feelings of wellbeing • decreased awareness of outside world • vomiting • constipation • pinpoint pupils • itching/scratching • dry mouth, skin and eyes • slowed pulse • respiratory arrest, coma, death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • injecting with dirty needles may cause abscesses and blood poisoning • sharing syringes carries a high risk of contracting blood-borne viruses eg. HIV, hepatitis B & C • risk of death by overdose • (these risks are also short-term risks as they may happen after only one dose) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • symptoms are flu-like (vary in intensity) • runny nose and eyes • sweating • agitation and irritability • cravings • muscular and abdominal cramps • vomiting, diarrhoea • insomnia • generalised joint pain / headache

Drug	Common forms	Potential short-term effects (dose related)	Potential long-term complications	Withdrawal signs and symptoms
<p>STIMULANTS (speed up the central nervous system)</p> <p>Generic effects may include: increased pulse rate, increased alertness and concentration, increased blood pressure, insomnia, increased capacity of muscle work, dry mouth, decreased appetite, anxiety, insomnia, tolerance</p>				
<p>1. Nicotine</p>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cigarette, pipe, cigar and chewing tobacco • snuff • nicotine gum (Nicorettes) • nicotine patches (Nicabate, Nicorette, Nicotinell, Prostep) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decreased muscle tension • headaches • nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea • tremors • nervous system activity stimulated then reduced • decreased taste and smell • decreased blood flow to extremities • dizziness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elevated risk of cancers • increased risk of emphysema, respiratory infections, shortness of breath, coughing • increased risk of heart attack, stroke, narrowing/hardening of blood vessels • stomach ulcers • speeds up physical signs of ageing • decreased hormone levels and fertility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased nervousness and tension • changes in sleeping patterns • digestive disturbances • loss of concentration • muscle spasms • headache • cough • increased appetite • craving for cigarettes

Drug	Common forms	Potential short-term effects (dose related)	Potential long-term complications	Withdrawal signs and symptoms
2. Amphetamines and related drugs				
speed, whiz, uppers, goey, meth, Louey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • amphetamine • dexamphetamine (Dexedrine) • methamphetamine • methylphenidate (Ritalin) • methylenedioxymeth-amphetamine (MDMA, ecstasy) • ephedrine, pseudoephedrine • ‘diet pills’: phentermine (Duromine), diethylpropion (Tenuate) • Khat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lasts 4-8 hrs • increased activity • excited state • disinhibition • sense of omnipotence and invincibility • delusions, confusion • dilated pupils • grinding of teeth • tremor • fever, sweating, flushing • nausea, vomiting • increased respiratory rate and depth • potential for violence, aggressive behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insomnia • anxiety, tension, agitation • skin complaints • malnutrition, eating disorders • sexual dysfunction • psychiatric disturbances paranoia, delusions, hallucinations • depression • high blood pressure, abnormal pulse rate, heart attack, stroke 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voracious appetite • prolonged sleep • nightmares • anxiety • severe depression (often of suicidal intensity)
4. Caffeine				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coffee • cola • cocoa • chocolate • No-Doz tablets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lasts 2-4 hrs • increased alertness • shaking • improved feeling of wellbeing • slower pulse rate at low levels, rapid pulse rate at high levels • diarrhoea • increased urinary output 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • restlessness • upset stomach • can be harmful for people with heart problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • headaches, muscle tension • irritability, anxiety • tiredness, yawning • decreased level of alertness

Drug	Common forms	Potential short-term effects (dose related)	Potential long-term complications	Withdrawal signs and symptoms
3. Cocaine				
coke, snow, Charlie, toot, blow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cocaine hydrochloride • freebase • crack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lasts 3-45 minutes, longer if taken orally • rush • euphoria, feeling of self-confidence and power followed by sense of dysphoria, agitation, anxiety • increased energy • postponement of fatigue • increased talkativeness • local anaesthesia • dilation of pupils • tremor, muscle twitches • headache • increased respiratory rate, body temperature, dry mouth • rapid, weak pulse, heart attack, arrhythmias • nausea, vomiting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of concentration and motivation • dizziness, aggression and mental disturbance • can cause psychiatric complications • inhalation (snorting) can lead to tearing the cartilage in the nose • sexual dysfunction • lung and kidney damage • rapid, weak pulse, heart attack, arrhythmias 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • craving • sleep disturbance • anxiety • depression

Drug	Common forms	Potential short-term effects (dose related)	Potential long-term complications	Withdrawal signs and symptoms
HALLUCINOGENS (distort the central nervous system)				
Generic effects may include: high pulse rate, blood pressure and respiratory rate, altered perceptions, distortion of senses				
1. LSD type effects				
acid, trips, mellow tabs, blotters, dots, tickets, microdots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD, acid) • dimethyltryptamine (DMT, businessman's lunch) • bromo-DMA • psilocybin (magic mushrooms) • lysergic acid amide (active chemical in morning glory plant) • ergotamine tartrate (in grain moulds) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lasts 6-12 hrs • pupillary dilatation • exaggerated reflexes • fever, sweating • dizziness, weakness, tremor, goosebumps • increased sensitivity to stimuli • mood lability • delusions , hallucinations (hearing, feeling, tasting, seeing, smelling things that don't exist) • confusion, disorientation • introspection, depersonalisation • altered body image • impaired attention and concentration • anxiety & panic • nausea, vomiting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can increase the risk of severe mental disturbances • can cause 'flashbacks' (drug experience recurs without taking the drug) • amotivational syndrome • higher risk of spontaneous abortions, congenital abnormalities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no physical withdrawal symptoms • cravings

Drug	Common forms	Potential short-term effects (dose related)	Potential long-term complications	Withdrawal signs and symptoms
2. Dissociative anaesthetics				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ketamine (Special K, Kitkat, K, vitamin K, Ket) • phencyclidine (PCP, angel dust) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effects last 30 – 90 minutes (PCP can last longer) • decreased sensitivity to pain • drowsiness • euphoria, relaxation, pleasant stimulation • decreased concentration, attention • pupil constriction in low doses, dilation in high doses • slurred speech • blurred vision • nausea & vomiting • numbness • impaired muscle coordination • at high doses, hallucinations, trance & dream states (including confusion of senses [‘hearing colours & seeing sounds’], out-of-body sensations) • anxiety, panic • posture spasms, catatonia, mutism • vertical, horizontal and rotary nystagmus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • little is known, may include: • memory problems • speech difficulties • depression & anxiety • suicidal feelings • withdrawal and isolation • psychosis • ‘flashbacks’ (drug experience recurs without taking the drug) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not known

Drug	Common forms	Potential short-term effects (dose related)	Potential long-term complications	Withdrawal signs and symptoms
3. Amphetamine-like in low doses, LSD-like in higher doses (psychedelics acting on norepinephrine)				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mescaline (peyote cactus) • DOM or STP (synthetic mescaline derivative) • Methlene-dioxymeth-amphetamine (MDMA, ecstasy, XTC, Adam) • myristin and elemicin (active ingredients in nutmeg and mace, similar in structure to mescaline) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lasts 4-8 hrs • highly stimulating • excitement, increased activity and decreased appetite • large doses delay sleep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inability to sleep • restlessness • headache • aggression • can cause severe mental and emotional disturbances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cravings

*Some of the material in this table was adapted from:

Custodial Drug Guide: Medical Management of People in Custody with Alcohol and Drug Problems, 2nd edition. Victoria Police, 2001.