

Introduction to Substance Abuse Drugs of Abuse

Matthew D. Bennett, Psy.D.

Rick McNeese, Ph.D.

First Step Recovery, Inc.



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Types of Drugs of Abuse

Alcohol is a legal, addictive drug that depresses the central nervous system. Driving while intoxicated is illegal in all states in the US. Even after one drink (1 oz of hard liquor, 1 beer, 1 glass of wine), driving ability is impaired. Alcohol is cumulatively poisonous, and damages many organs of the body when used excessively (including the brain, liver, and heart). Chronic, heavy use of alcohol may lead to irreversible physical and neurological damage.

In 2001, Nebraska logged 96 DUI fatalities. ⁽⁴⁾

In Nebraska, a “drunk driver” is defined as a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .08 or 8%. 1st offense gets 90 days license suspension. ⁽⁵⁾

Types of Drugs of Abuse

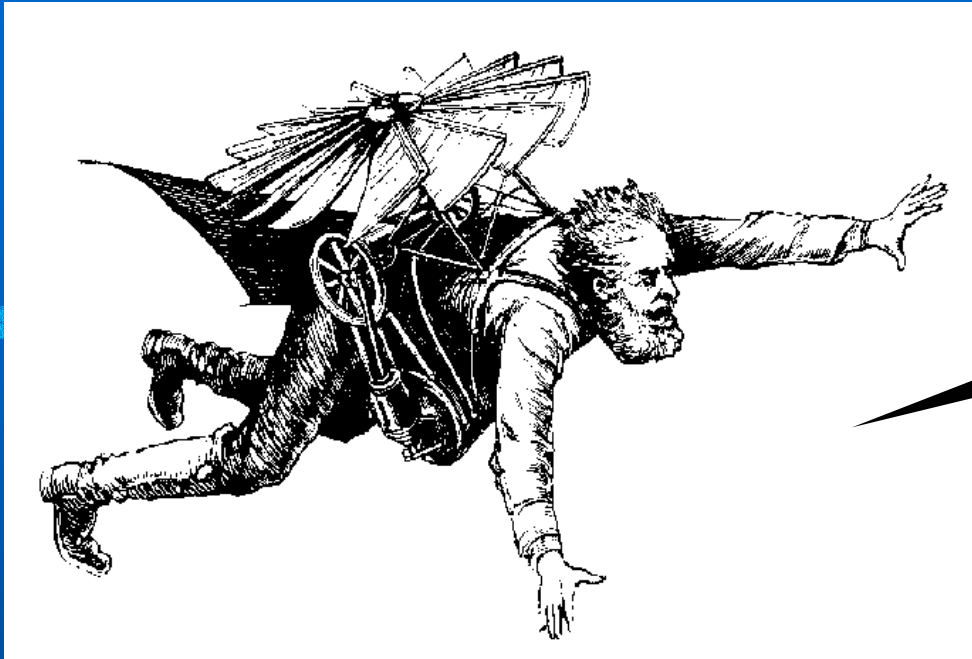
Cocaine is a strong central nervous system stimulant that affects the distribution of dopamine, a chemical messenger associated with pleasure. Dopamine part of the brain's reward system and helps create the high that comes with cocaine consumption. Cocaine usually looks like a white powder used for sniffing or snorting, injecting, and smoking (in the case of **free-base** and **crack cocaine**). In addition to the desired high, cocaine may produce feelings of restlessness, irritability, and anxiety, or even mania or psychosis.

Heroin is a very addictive drug processed from morphine, a substance extracted from the seedpod of the Asian poppy plant. Heroin produces a feeling of euphoria (a "rush") and often a warm flushing of the skin, dry mouth, and heavy feelings in the arms and legs. After the initial euphoria, the user may go into an alternately wakeful and drowsy state. Heroin is the second most frequent cause of drug-related deaths.

Types of Drugs of Abuse

Marijuana (weed, or cannabis) is one of the most common drugs of abuse in Nebraska. Marijuana looks like a dry, shredded green/brown blend of flowers, stems, seeds, and leaves of a particular hemp plant. It usually is smoked as a cigarette, pipe, or in blunts, which are cigars that have been emptied of tobacco and refilled with marijuana. The main active chemical in marijuana is THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), which quickly passes from the lungs into the bloodstream, and on to organs throughout the body, including the brain. Some of the short-term effects of marijuana use include problems with memory and learning; bizarre or distorted perceptions; difficulty in problem solving; loss of coordination; and increased heart rate.

A study has suggested that a user's risk of heart attack more than quadruples in the first hour after smoking marijuana. ⁽⁶⁾



But marijuana isn't even addictive, and besides, everybody does it!

Wrong on both counts, actually. But this illustrates the *permission thoughts* that serve to enable continued substance abuse. Permission thoughts (called "stinking thinking" in 12-step programs) make it "okay" for the individual to keep using, and you're likely to encounter them if you ask a user about his or her habits.

Types of Drugs of Abuse

Methamphetamine (“meth”) is made in illegal laboratories and has a high potential for abuse and dependence. It is often taken orally, snuffed, or injected. Methamphetamine hydrochloride, clear crystals resembling ice, can be inhaled by smoking, and is referred to as "ice," "crystal," and "glass." Use of methamphetamine produces a fast euphoria, and often, fast addiction. Chronic, heavy use of methamphetamine can produce a psychotic disorder which is hard to tell apart from schizophrenia (methamphetamine induced psychosis). The drug also causes increased heart rate and irreversible damage to blood vessels.

According to the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Program, 11 percent of adult male arrestees in Omaha tested positive for methamphetamine in 2000. ⁽⁷⁾

Meth produced by Mexican criminal groups in Mexico, California, and southwestern states is the predominant type available in Nebraska. ⁽⁸⁾

Types of Drugs of Abuse

Ecstasy (MDMA) is the so-called "party drug," It has both stimulant (like cocaine) and hallucinogenic (like LSD) effects. Ecstasy is neurotoxic (poisonous to brain cells), and in high doses it causes a steep increases in body temperature leading to muscle breakdown, and possible organ failure. Side effects may last for weeks after use, and including high blood pressure, faintness, confusion, depression, sleep problems, anxiety, and paranoia. ⁽⁹⁾

Acid (LSD) LSD, also called "acid," is sold in the street in tablets, capsules, or even liquid form. It is clear and odorless, and is usually taken by mouth. Often LSD is added to pieces of absorbent paper divided into small decorated squares, each containing one dose. LSD is a hallucinogen and a very powerful mood-altering chemical. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Types of Drugs of Abuse

Prescription drugs. Using a prescription drug in a manner other than the intended prescription constitutes drug abuse. Some of the more commonly abused prescription drugs are:

- ✓ Pain-relieving narcotics (Percodan, Codeine, Vicodin, Percocet)
- ✓ Tranquilizers and sedatives (Halcion, Xanax, Ativan, Valium, BuSpar, Valium, Phenobarbital)
- ✓ Muscle relaxants (Soma)
- ✓ Prescription amphetamines (Ritalin, Cylert, Adderall)
- ✓ OxyContin

Types of Drugs of Abuse

Over the counter drugs. Many different types of over-the-counter drugs and other substances can be abused. Just a few examples include:

- ✓ Inhalants (paint thinners, nitrous oxide, model glue, magic marker fluid, spray paints, propane, butane, etc.)
- ✓ Dramamine
- ✓ Mouthwashes
- ✓ Diet aids
- ✓ Cough and cold medications (especially those containing DXM, like Drixoral Cough Liquid Caps, Robitussin AC, Dectuss, Phenergan etc.)



I don't do any HARD drugs.

This is another example of a permission thought. The distinction between "hard" and "soft" drugs is actually meaningless because ALL drugs of abuse can lead to the same consequence....addiction.

Once a person becomes addicted to ONE drug (marijuana, alcohol, prescription meds, heroin, etc), he or she is as good as addicted to ALL drugs of abuse. For this reason, we train addicts for ABSTINENCE from all drugs of abuse.

Do doctors always know best?

Educate your doctor?? All this talk about abuse of medications makes you wonder: are physicians aware of how addictive these drugs can be?

Many otherwise excellent physicians haven't been well trained in the addiction. During the four years doctors spend in medical school, addiction issues often get little attention. A doctor may not recognize that even one pain-reliever pill can set off powerful and destabilizing cravings in an addict.

It's a good idea for any addict to tell their doctor about his or her addiction, and to get proactive about avoiding all drugs of abuse.