

What are the risks  
of using cannabis?



Understanding drugs

# In an emergency

If you are with a friend who collapses, becomes unconscious or is obviously ill from the effects of any type of drug, do the right thing:

- If possible, **put the person in a safe, quiet place**
- If you can, **put them in the recovery position** (see inside back cover) and make sure their airway is clear
- **Dial 999 for an ambulance.** The emergency call won't appear on your mobile call list or statement
- Be ready to **tell the emergency services operator that you need the ambulance service**, where you are (look around for landmarks or ask someone if you don't know). You'll also need to tell them about the person who is unwell, and, if you can, what the problem is.

If the person has been **taking drugs**, you must tell the ambulance crew when they arrive – they will be able to use the information and it may save your friend's life.

You should **phone your parents or family** to let them know where you are and that you are safe.

For information on the **recovery position**, see inside back cover.

# Introduction

This booklet is about drugs – of all types. It tells you about some of the more common drugs, what their effects are, and what they look like.

It also tells you about the **law on drugs** and how getting into trouble with the law can affect your future.

There are also some **facts and figures** about **drugs and drug use** – some of these may surprise you!

You'll find places to get **more information** online and elsewhere.

The more you know and understand about drugs, the easier it will be for you to make choices to stay safe and healthy.

**This is your booklet – your own copy to keep.**  
**You may be using it in some lessons at school.**

Drugs – what are they?	04
The risks of taking drugs	06
Drug information	08
What's the law?	26
Who really <i>is</i> taking drugs – the facts	28
Can I talk to FRANK?	30
True or false?	32
Further information	33
What to do in an emergency	Inside front and back covers

# Drugs – what are they?

A substance which people take to change the way they feel, think or behave.

**So, the word 'drugs' includes:**

- Alcohol and tobacco
- Volatile substances including gases (e.g. butane), glues and aerosols
- The whole range of illegal drugs such as cannabis, ecstasy or cocaine
- Medicines such as paracetamol or cough mixture.



## Drug classification

Illegal drugs are divided into Class A, B or C, according to the harm they can do. Class A drugs are the most harmful but Class C drugs, such as cannabis, are also illegal and harmful to use.

Here are some examples of Class A, Class B and Class C drugs:

### Class **A**

Ecstasy, Heroin, Cocaine and Crack Cocaine

### Class **B**

Amphetamines (Speed)

### Class **C**

Cannabis, Tranquillisers, Anabolic Steroids

Some of these drugs have a legitimate medicinal use and therefore can be prescribed by a doctor e.g. tranquillisers (see p.25). However, unless they have been prescribed for you, it is illegal for you to have them in your possession.

# What are the risks of taking drugs?

Every time you take a drug, whatever it is, you take a risk. Taking a risk means doing something which might cause you harm, either now or in the future.

Things that can make the risk bigger or smaller include...

- **What the drug is**

A Class A drug is more harmful than a Class C drug

- **How much of the drug you use**

It is more risky to take a lot of a drug than a little. But just a little of some drugs might be enough to kill you



- **Whether it is smoked, injected, sniffed or eaten**

Injecting drugs has an extra risk – used or dirty needles could pass on a serious infection such as HIV or hepatitis

- **Where the drugs have come from**

Drugs can be mixed with other ingredients that can make them more harmful. You may not know if the drug has been mixed with something or not

- **Using more than one drug**

Most drugs become more harmful if they are taken with another drug, such as alcohol

- **When and where it is used**

If you are somewhere on your own, it may be some time before anyone finds you if you become ill.

# Drug information

## Legal status

Whether it is legal or illegal, and, for illegal drugs, whether they are Class A, B or C.

## Names

What it might be called, including slang or street names.

## What does it look like?

Whether it is a powder, leaves, liquid and so on.

## How is it taken?

Smoked, injected, sniffed/inhaled, or as a drink.

## Cannabis

**LEGAL STATUS: Illegal**  
**CLASS** Ⓜ

### Names often used for cannabis:

Weed, marijuana, grass, pot, ganja, hash, blow, puff, skunk. (Skunk is usually a stronger version of cannabis.)

### What does it look like?

Chopped leaves, dried herbs (grass, weed or skunk), or a lump that looks like dried mud (resin).

### How is it taken?

Cannabis is usually smoked mixed with tobacco in rolled paper, called a joint or spliff. It can also be smoked in a pipe (bong), brewed like tea or eaten in food such as cakes.

### How would I feel if I took it?

#### What are its effects?

You might feel happy and relaxed.

#### **BUT**

You might laugh at things that aren't funny, feel hungry, frightened, confused, paranoid or unable to concentrate.

#### **Remember...**

It is illegal to possess, sell or share cannabis. Penalties can be severe.

## How would I feel?

## What are its effects?

Describes what happens when you take the drug and its effects on your behaviour.

On the next few pages, you'll find important information about the drugs you are most likely to come across.



What might happen to me?

What are the risks?

**Cannabis can:**

- Damage your lungs when mixed with tobacco and smoked
- Make it hard to concentrate
- Cause paranoia, depression and anxiety
- Cause problems with remembering things
- Make mental health problems worse.

**What might happen?**

**What are the risks?**

Describes the effects on your body and health, and the risks of taking the drug.

If you want to know more about any of the drugs in this booklet, visit [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com) where you will find more information.

The following pages give you information on:

Alcohol	10
Tobacco	12
Cannabis	14
Gases, glues and aerosols	16
Ecstasy	18
Cocaine and crack cocaine	20
Heroin	22
LSD	24
Speed (amphetamines)	24
Tranquillisers	25

# Alcohol

**LEGAL STATUS:** Legal but *illegal* for someone under 18 to buy alcohol or to be sold alcohol

## Found in:

Alcoholic drinks – beer, cider, wine, and spirits such as whisky, rum, gin and vodka.

## Names often used for alcoholic drinks:

Booze, the bottle, drink, bevy, liquor, the hard stuff (refers mainly to spirits).

## How would I feel if I took it?

### What are its effects?

You might feel happy, relaxed and friendly.

### **BUT**

You might also feel sick, angry and argumentative. After a while it slows the brain and body down and you might find it hard to walk and speak properly. Alcohol affects people in different ways. If you drink alcohol regularly you can get dependent on it (you need to keep drinking it and may need it to feel normal).

## What might happen to me?

### What are the risks?

#### **Alcohol can:**

- Make you sick (vomit) and you could choke on your own vomit



- Make it harder to do things such as ride a bike, use a computer
- Make you more likely to have accidents such as falling over or getting run over in the street
- Make you bad-tempered, so you risk getting into arguments and fights
- Relax you so you might be more likely to take risks that you wouldn't otherwise do, such as having unprotected sex
- Make it hard to concentrate
- Make you behave differently – such as acting silly, showing off
- Make you dependent on alcohol, so you find it hard to control how much you drink
- Damage your liver if you drink a lot – if you drink often or binge-drink.

# Tobacco (nicotine)

**LEGAL STATUS:** Legal, but *illegal* to sell to under-16s

The drug in tobacco is called nicotine.

**Names often used for tobacco:**

Fags, baccy, ciggies, smokes, tabs.



## How is it taken?

Smoked in cigarettes, roll-ups (hand-made cigarettes), pipes and cigars – may also be chewed or sniffed.

## How would I feel if I took it?

### What are its effects?

The first few times you are likely to feel dizzy and light-headed.

### BUT

You might also feel sick and smell of tobacco smoke. If you smoke regularly, you would quickly feel that it was something that you needed to do to feel normal, so you would become increasingly dependent.

## What might happen to me?

### What are the risks?

#### If you smoke regularly you can:

- Get cancer of the lung or mouth – which can cause death
- Get heart disease
- Get lung infections.

### Remember...

You can quickly become dependent on the nicotine in tobacco, and it is then very hard to give up smoking.

Most parents who smoke don't want their children to start smoking.

Smoking can become a very expensive habit.

# Cannabis

**LEGAL STATUS: Illegal**  
**CLASS C**

## Names often used for cannabis:

Weed, marijuana, grass, pot, ganja, hash, blow, puff, skunk. (Skunk is usually a stronger version of cannabis.)

## What does it look like?

Chopped leaves, dried herbs (grass, weed or skunk), or a lump that looks like dried mud (resin).

## How is it taken?

Cannabis is usually smoked mixed with tobacco in rolled paper, called a joint or spliff. It can also be smoked in a pipe (bong), brewed like tea or eaten in food such as cakes.

## How would I feel if I took it?

### What are its effects?

You might feel happy and relaxed.

### **BUT**

You might laugh at things that aren't funny, feel hungry, frightened, confused, paranoid or unable to concentrate.

## Remember...

It is illegal to possess, sell or share cannabis.  
Penalties can be severe.



**What might happen to me?**

**What are the risks?**

**Cannabis can:**

- Damage your lungs when mixed with tobacco and smoked
- Make it hard to concentrate
- Cause paranoia, depression and anxiety
- Cause problems with remembering things
- Make mental health problems worse.

# Volatile substances

## (gases, glues and aerosols)

**LEGAL STATUS:** Legal, but *illegal* for shopkeepers to sell to under-18s if they suspect it will be misused\*

Volatile substances such as gases (e.g. butane), glues and aerosols are found in many products (such as lighter refills, glues, hairsprays, etc.). They are very dangerous when misused.

### How is it taken?

Usually inhaled (breathed in) or sniffed through the nose.

### How would I feel if I took it?

#### What are the effects?

You might feel dizzy and giggly.

#### **BUT**

**It could kill you straight away**, even the first time you try it. Feeling sick and tired is also common.

\*It is illegal to sell butane lighter refills to under-18s in any circumstances.

## What might happen to me?

### What are the risks?

#### Sniffing or inhaling gas, glue or aerosols can:

- Cause sickness and choking, blackouts and heart failure, leading to coma and heart problems
- Cause your heart rate and breathing to change, which can be very frightening.

### Remember...

About 15 young people die every year in England from sniffing volatile substances. That's more than one a month.



# Ecstasy

**LEGAL STATUS:** Illegal  
**CLASS** **A**

## Names often used for ecstasy:

Pills, E, white doves, biscuits, XTC, MDMA.

## What does it look like?

White or coloured tablets, pills or capsules.

## How is it taken?

Ecstasy is usually swallowed, but may be sniffed as a ground-up powder.

## How would I feel if I took it?

### What are the effects?

It may give you energy, make you feel alert and in tune with your surroundings.

### **BUT**

**You can die from taking a single tablet.** It can also cause anxiety, panic attacks, confusion and dehydration.

## Remember...

Taking ecstasy is dangerous and illegal. A danger of taking ecstasy while dancing is the risk of overheating and dehydration – drinking water can help prevent this, but no more than about a pint of water an hour as drinking too much water can be just as dangerous as not drinking enough.



## What might happen to me?

### What are the risks?

- Drinking too much water if taking ecstasy can cause serious illness or even death
- Overheating and dehydration through lack of water can also kill
- You may not know what is in the tablet.

# Cocaine and crack cocaine

**LEGAL STATUS: Illegal**  
**CLASS A**

## Names often used for cocaine and crack cocaine:

Coke, snow, rock, charlie.

## What does it look like?

A white powder, crystals, clear liquid or rock (crack).

## How is it taken?

The powder is sniffed up the nose, often through a straw, from 'lines' laid out on a smooth surface. It can also be rubbed on to the gums. Some people inject it. Crack cocaine is usually smoked in a pipe.

## How would I feel if I took it?

### What are the effects?

You would probably feel more confident and energetic, happy and talkative.

### **BUT**

Cocaine is very addictive, so you would want to take it again, but the effect is never as strong as the first time and you could start taking more and more to get the same high. You can feel run-down, aggressive and anxious if you take it often.

## What might happen to me? What are the risks?

### Taking cocaine or crack can:

- Cause death from an overdose
- Damage your nose or your lungs
- Cause breathing problems if you smoke crack cocaine
- Stop you wanting to eat or being able to sleep if you take it often
- Make you need more and more to get the same effect.



# Heroin

**LEGAL STATUS: Illegal**  
**CLASS A**

## Names often used for heroin:

Smack, H, skag, junk, horse.

## What does it look like?

A brownish-white powder that is often wrapped in paper folded like a small envelope.

## How is it taken?

Heroin can be smoked, sniffed or injected.

## How would I feel if I took it?

### What are the effects?

Heroin can make you feel warm, relaxed and content.

### **BUT**

Heroin is very addictive, and you need more and more to avoid serious withdrawal symptoms. The first time you take heroin it would probably make you feel sick and dizzy.



## What might happen to me?

### What are the risks?

#### Taking heroin can:

- Cause unconsciousness leading to coma or death – especially if taken with alcohol
- Cause after-effects including tiredness, sweating and muscle cramps
- Make it difficult to sleep
- Make you lose your appetite.

# LSD

**LEGAL STATUS: Illegal**  
**CLASS A**

LSD is usually swallowed on a small piece of paper (tab) or as a pill or capsule. LSD is a hallucinogenic drug which changes the way you see, feel or smell things. You might think that some things are real when they are not.

The experience ('trip') can be good. Colours seem brighter, people can seem more interesting.

## **BUT**

A bad experience can be frightening or confusing. You could possibly harm yourself while having a bad trip and you might also get flashbacks days or months after the event.

# Speed (amphetamines)

**LEGAL STATUS: Illegal**  
**CLASS B**

**CLASS A** if prepared for injection

Speed is sold illegally as an off-white or pink powder. It can be swallowed, sniffed, rubbed onto the gums or injected. Amphetamines are available on prescription for medicinal purposes (see p.5), though this is rare today. Speed makes you feel energetic, alert and chatty.

## **BUT**

It can also make you feel anxious and panicky, and the comedown (how you feel after the high has worn off) can leave you feeling depressed. Physical effects can include high blood pressure, headaches and heart problems.

# **Tranquillisers** (such as Rohypnol)

## **LEGAL STATUS: Illegal** **CLASS C**

Tranquillisers are calming drugs that are sold illegally, but they can also be prescribed for medicinal purposes (see p.5) e.g. to treat anxiety and sleeplessness.

## **BUT**

They can be dangerous if taken with other drugs such as alcohol, which can lead to an overdose. Tranquillisers can be used as 'date rape' drugs, when they are added to people's drinks, causing the person to become drowsy and to lose their memory so they may not know what is happening to them. Tranquillisers come in a variety of forms, such as tablets and powder. In powder form, they can quickly and easily be dissolved in liquids, such as an alcoholic drink.

# What's the law?

Possessing, sharing or supplying (including giving drugs to someone else even when there's no money involved) an illegal drug could get you into trouble.

**Getting into trouble with the police over drugs and going to court could mean you'll have a criminal record, and this can have consequences in the future:**

- It may be more difficult to get a job. You may have to declare it when applying for some jobs, which is not so good if there's a lot of people wanting the same job!
- You may not readily be able to travel to certain countries, such as America or Australia.

## Remember...

Cannabis is an illegal drug, and there can be severe maximum penalties for possessing it or supplying it to others. The maximum penalty for possession is 2 years in prison and 14 years for supply – as well as an unlimited fine.

Getting caught with drugs may also get you excluded from school – which is bad news for your education and chances of getting good exam results.

What happens will depend on your school's drug policy – ask your teacher to tell you what it says. A criminal record for a drugs offence may also affect your chances of getting into college or university.

### **It is against the law:**

- To have any illegal drugs in your possession (unless prescribed for you e.g. tranquillisers) or to give or sell (supply) them to anyone. The penalties if you are caught can be severe. For instance, the maximum penalty for possession of Class A drugs (such as ecstasy and cocaine) is 7 years in prison and life imprisonment for their supply as well as an unlimited fine
- For shop staff to sell cigarettes to anyone who is under 16
- For anyone under 18 to buy alcohol or for anyone else to buy it for them
- For shop staff to sell products such as gases, glues, and aerosols to anyone under 18 if they think the product may be misused. It is illegal to sell butane lighter refills to under-18s in any circumstances.

# Who really *is* taking drugs – the facts

Every year, in a large national survey, young people in your age group are asked anonymously about drugs and drug use.

These are some of the results from 2005:

- 1** Most young people (95%) aged 12 have never used an illegal drug
- 2** Young people aged 11-15 are much more likely to have drunk alcohol or smoked a cigarette than to have taken any other drug
- 3** But only one in twenty 13 year-olds smokes one or more cigarettes a week
- 4** Only 3% of 12 year-olds have ever used cannabis – so that means that 97 out of 100 haven't
- 5** The survey found that just six out of every hundred 12 year-olds had tried sniffing gas or glue (volatile substances)
- 6** At your age you are more likely to be offered cannabis than any other illegal drug. Generally Class A drugs like cocaine don't really feature among your age group.



**15 year-olds** Only about 1 in 4 of you has ever used cannabis.



**13 year-olds** Only 1 in 20 of you smokes one or more cigarettes a week.

# Can I talk to FRANK?

**FRANK is the national drugs information service. The FRANK helpline gets hundreds of questions about drugs. Here are some of the questions asked by 11-14 year-olds – and the answers they got:**

## **What's the worst drug?**

All drugs are potentially dangerous. Some can harm you physically, such as heroin, while other drugs can affect your mind, such as cannabis and cocaine. Class A drugs are the most harmful but other drugs, such as misusing gases, glues and aerosols can cause sudden death, even the first time you use them.

## **I took drugs last night and am now worried that I am addicted.**

Drugs aren't always addictive and if you have only taken a drug once it is unlikely that you will be addicted. Some drugs are more addictive than others – tobacco is one of the most addictive.

## **I took speed last weekend – have I done myself any physical damage?**

The physical effects of using speed can include high blood pressure, headaches and heart problems. If you only took the drug for the first time the chances of long-term effects are low. But if you are still concerned and are experiencing worrying symptoms then you should see your doctor.

## **I am worried about my friend who is using cannabis.**

You should talk to your friend. Make sure they are aware that cannabis is illegal and that there are risks involved in taking it. Does your friend know that cannabis is linked to mental illness such as paranoia and schizophrenia? For more information, give your friend FRANK's helpline number:

**Tel: 0800 77 66 00**  
**[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)**

## **Where do drugs come from?**

Some drugs are made from plants, such as cannabis and heroin, while other drugs are man-made in laboratories. There is no quality control with illegal drugs, like there is with pharmaceutical drugs or even food. So you can never be 100% sure of what you are actually taking.

# True or false?

**Cannabis is natural, so it doesn't do any harm.**

**False**

It doesn't matter if a drug is 'natural' or man-made – it can still be harmful. Cannabis can cause paranoia, depression and anxiety and can also cause lung disease, especially if it's smoked mixed with tobacco.

For some people cannabis can increase the chance of mental illness. So cannabis can cause you serious harm – that's why it is an illegal drug.

**You won't get a police record the first time you get caught with drugs.**

**False**

If you get a reprimand or warning from the police, this will stay on your record for five years or until you are 18. If you are convicted of a drugs offence you will get a criminal record – and could go to prison. This record can have serious effects on your life – see p26-27 for more on this.

**Drugs are more likely to be safe and pure if friends or family have given them to you.**

**False**

They probably won't know where the drugs have come from or how pure they are, either.

# Where can I go for further information?

## Websites, phone lines, other sources

If you are worried about drugs, either for yourself or someone else, you can get help in lots of different ways. Here are some ideas.

### Talk to FRANK

FRANK is the national drugs information service, offering friendly, confidential advice about drugs and drug use to young people and parents.

FRANK is available 24 hours a day on:

**Tel: 0800 77 66 00 or [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)**

### ChildLine

Children and young people can call the helpline about any problem, at any time, day or night.

**Helpline: 0800 1111**  
**[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)**

### Crimestoppers

If you want to give information about crime, call Crimestoppers, in confidence – you won't have to say who you are.

**Helpline: 0800 555 111**  
**[www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)**

# Where can I go for further information?

continued...

## Drinkline

Information and advice about sensible drinking.

**Helpline: 0800 917 8282**  
**[www.downyourdrink.org.uk](http://www.downyourdrink.org.uk)**

## NHS Smoking helpline

Advice, information and support for people who want to stop smoking and stay stopped.

**Helpline: 0800 169 0 169**  
**[www.givingupsmoking.co.uk](http://www.givingupsmoking.co.uk)**

## Re-Solv

Information for anyone concerned about solvent and volatile substance misuse – gases, glues and aerosols.

**Helpline: 0808 800 2345**  
**[www.re-solv.org](http://www.re-solv.org)**

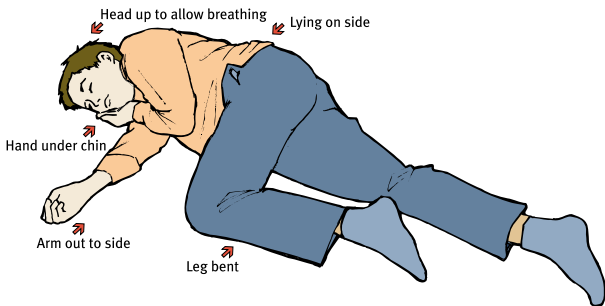
# In an emergency

continued...

## The recovery position

Never leave anyone lying on their back – put them on their side as shown in the diagram.

The illustration shows the person in the recovery position.



Practise with a friend how to put someone in the recovery position – it's a useful skill to have in any emergency, and you may need to use it one day.



Your guide to knowing more about  
the risks and effects of drugs

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