

SUBSTANCE



You might take drugs for all kinds of different reasons. You might do it to fit in with a group, or because you want to try something new and find out what it's like. Or it could be to deal with family problems, or cope with difficult experiences you've had.

If you choose to take illegal drugs, please remember it can lead to a criminal conviction which could end up affecting things in your future, like getting a job. And if you're under 18, it's against the law to buy (or try to buy) alcohol, or to drink alcohol in licensed premises like restaurants, pubs, bars and clubs.



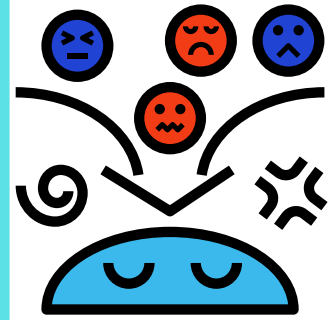
MISUSE

Maybe you've been offered drugs, or you know other people who use them. If so, it's a good idea to know the facts about drugs and alcohol, how they can affect your mental health, and where to go if you ever want help and advice.

Drugs can act as stimulants, depressants or hallucinogens, or a combination of these. They can make you feel more energised, confident, relaxed, 'spaced out', speeded up, slowed down and bring on a distorted perception of reality. They can be very harmful to both body and mind, especially in still-developing young people, affecting heart rate, organ function, temperature control, mood and mental health.

Drugs, Alcohol & Mental Health

There are quite a few ways that drugs and alcohol can have an effect on your mental health. Some people use alcohol or drugs as a way of dealing with difficult feelings and emotions. These feelings could come from stressful, upsetting or abusive experiences you've had. Or they might be linked to a mental health problem. But alcohol and drugs can make bad emotions feel even worse and this can have a negative impact on your mental health.



You might reach a point where you feel like the drug is in control of you, rather than the other way around. Maybe you're using it in private, away from friends, and your life revolves around getting more of it. If so, you could be getting addicted, and addiction can often be linked with mental health problems.

There's also a risk that using drugs could make a mental health condition worse – or make you more likely to develop one. There's a strong link between cannabis use and paranoia and psychosis. Other drugs such as LSD and magic mushrooms can make you physically very ill, cause you to hallucinate or have flashbacks, or even kill you.



If you have a mental health problem that affects your judgement, you might be more likely to take drugs and engage in taking other types of risks. If you're going to take drugs, it's important to know what effect different types of drugs have on your body, and speak to your GP about how it could affect any mental health medications you are taking.

If you're worried at all about your drug or alcohol use, it can help to talk to someone you trust about it. That could be a friend, parent, teacher or counsellor. You can also contact a helpline service who can help you with how you're feeling.

You should also see your GP if you are worried about the impact of drugs and alcohol on your mental health and wellbeing, particularly if:

- You feel like your drug or alcohol use is no longer under your control, and that you cannot cope without it
- You get withdrawal symptoms when you don't take it
- You think you might be a risk to yourself or other people - for example, if you have unexplained cuts and bruises, or blackouts, confusion and difficulty remembering what happened while drinking or on drugs
- You are feeling secretive and ashamed about what you are doing

GETTING HELP

Speaking to your GP might feel very difficult, but they will have heard from many other young people like you who are going through something similar, and they won't judge you - they just want to help. Being honest takes a lot of bravery, but you can do it, and you will get through it.

You might find it helpful to write your thoughts down before you go to your GP to help you feel more confident. If you really don't want to tell anyone what you're using and how often, you could focus on letting them know the effect your drug or alcohol use is having on your life and the problems it is causing you.

You can also find lots of reliable information online about drug use and places to find support. The FRANK website is a really good place to start.

FRANK
0800 77 66 00 talktofrank.com
Friendly, confidential drugs advice