

Indicators

Indicators of Alcohol, drug and substance misuse or abuse

This may help you recognise any potential characteristics of alcohol or substance misuse or abuse. However, they are not confined to such problems and therefore you should apply caution in their interpretation:

Absenteeism

- Multiple instances of unauthorised absence
- Excessive sickness absence
- Frequent absences occurring on the same day e.g. Mondays and/or Fridays
- Excessive lateness e.g. Monday mornings or returning from lunch
- Leaving work early
- Unusual and increasingly unlikely reasons for absence
- Frequent spontaneous short-term absence with or without explanation
- Unusually high absent rates for diarrhoea, colds, flu, gastro-enteritis etc.

High Accident Rate

- Frequent accidents at work
- Accidents elsewhere e.g. at home, travelling to work

Difficulty in Concentration

- Work requires greater effort
- Tasks take longer than normal to complete

Confusion

- Sudden changes in behaviour patterns
- Difficulty in recalling instructions or details
- Increasing difficulty in dealing with complex assignments
- Difficulty in identifying or recalling own mistakes
- Possible hallucinations
- Unbalanced emotions or mood swings e.g. Loss of temper, having a short fuse etc

Irregular Work Patterns

- Poor timekeeping
- Alternating periods of high and low productivity
- Increasing general unreliability and unpredictability
- Repeated unnecessary absences from post e.g. overlong breaks
- Frequent trips to the toilet

Changes in Personal Behaviour

- Increased tiredness
- Loss of interest in work
- Hand tremors, flushed face, slurred speech, unsteady gait, staring or bleary eyes
- Deterioration in personal hygiene or appearance
- Unusual stains, marks or smells on clothes or body
- Infections leading to sores, abscesses, jaundice or blood poisoning

Deterioration in Job Efficiency

- Missed deadlines
- Mistakes due to inattention or poor judgement
- Poor decision making
- Implausible excuses for poor work performance

Deterioration of Interpersonal Skills

- Overreaction to real or imagined criticism
- Unreasonable resentment
- Irritability, aggression, mood changes or lethargy
- Complaints from colleagues, deterioration in relationships with colleagues
- Avoidance of supervisors, colleagues or other employees
- Borrowing money, dishonesty or theft

Description and Effects of Alcohol, drug and substance misuse or abuse

Alcohol

Damage may be caused to your liver, nervous system, heart, stomach and intestine. It may reduce your immunity, the ability to fight off infection as well as increased blood pressure.

You can help yourself by being aware of how much you drink each week, by avoiding drinking binges and by spreading your consumption over a week. The Government recommends that men limit their consumption to between 3 and 4 units per day or less, and women to between 2 and 3 units per day or less. For more information see www.drinkaware.co.uk

One unit of alcohol equals:

- Half a pint of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider
- A small glass of wine
- Single measure of spirits
- Small glass of sherry

Remember that drinks poured at home are often more generous than bar measures. It takes on average one hour to eliminate one unit of alcohol from the body. However, a given amount of alcohol will generally result in a higher blood alcohol level in women than in men.

Drugs

Drug abuse, is illegal and can cause considerable physical and mental harm and can kill. Solvent abuse can have the same effects. The effects of some drugs on the body and the mind may continue for a considerable time after use. However, caution should be exercised as some of the effects of drugs could also be caused by other illnesses. The most commonly used substances are:

Cannabis – results in a “laid back” attitude and reduced concentration, and despite feeling “normal” the impairment to perception and memory can last for over 24 hours after use. Long term effects may manifest themselves in depression and irritability. **Cannabis is a Class B Drug**

Drug

Amphetamines – also known as speed, whiz, or uppers. These are the second most widely used drugs in the UK. In the long term, users may experience exhaustion, inability to concentrate, paranoia, irritability and restlessness. **Amphetamines are Class B drug**

Methamphetamines – also know as crystal meth. These are closely related to Amphetamines but have a greater effect on the central nervous system. Users may experience nausea, panic attacks, compulsive repetitive behaviours and jaw clenches. **Methamphetamines are a Class A drugs**

Cocaine – stimulates the central nervous system. Short-term effects include a marked increase in energy, alertness and a feeling of well being, which leads to exhaustion and an inability to concentrate. Prolonged abuse leads to anxiety, memory loss and paranoia. **Cocaine is a Class A drug**

Heroin – slows down the central nervous system, slowing down breathing and the pulse rate. If too much is taken, breathing can stop completely. Using can lead to many health problems - especially if injected and the sharing of infected needles is practised - such as abscesses, infections, hepatitis and HIV. **Heroin is a Class A drug**

Hallucinogens – alter mood and perception e.g. LSD, Ecstasy. Both these are **Class A drugs**.

Solvents – substances that alter perception and mood e.g. glue, lighter fuel, paint thinners. It is not illegal to possess solvents

Legal Highs - Legal highs' that are actually legal contain one or more chemical substances which produce similar effects to illegal drugs (like [cocaine](#), [cannabis](#) and [ecstasy](#)). These new substances are not yet controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and there is often not enough research about them to know about their potency, adverse effects from human consumption, or when used with other substances or alcohol. The main effects of almost all 'psychoactive' drugs, including 'legal highs', can be described using three main categories:

- stimulants
- 'downers' or sedatives
- Psychedelics or hallucinogens.

Ecstasy - (also known by its chemical name, MDMA) is often seen as the original designer drug because of its high profile links to dance music culture in the late 80s and early 90s. Clubbers took ecstasy to feel energised, happy, to stay awake and to dance for hours. The effects take about half an hour to kick in and tend to last between 3 to 6 hours, followed by a gradual comedown. Short-term risks of ecstasy can include feeling anxious or getting panic attacks, and developing confused episodes, paranoia or even psychosis.

(Note: this list is not exhaustive)