

Drugs, alcohol and cigarettes

There are many people in the UK who drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or use drugs. These things can be harmful to people's health and can also be illegal.



Drugs

There are two types of drugs – legal drugs and illegal drugs. Legal drugs are helpful for us, and we all use them. For example, we can buy aspirin or ibuprofen ‘over the counter’ for headaches or other pain, or we can get drugs with a prescription from our doctor. You should never take a prescription drug if you don't have a prescription for it from your doctor because it could be dangerous.

Illegal drugs, on the other hand, are harmful for us, and can be addictive. If you start taking them it will be very difficult for you to stop. Some illegal drugs are more harmful than others. Class A drugs, such as heroin or crack cocaine, are the most harmful. They can damage



your health, and they are very addictive. Some people become so addicted that they have to steal to get enough money to pay for the drug. So drug taking can lead people to a life of crime.

Class B drugs are not so addictive but are also harmful. An example is cannabis. It is not as addictive as class A drugs, but can cause health problems. It can be particularly dangerous if you have mental health problems.



Drugs and the law

If the police find you with a Class A drug in your pocket you could be sent to prison for up to 7 years. If you deal in Class A drugs (buy and sell them) you could go to prison for life. For cannabis you could get up to 5 years for possession (having it in your pocket), and 14 years for dealing. Drug dealing is a more serious crime than possession.

Alcohol

Drinking a small amount of alcohol is fine and does not damage your health. The government recommends that women should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units of alcohol every day. (One unit is one medium glass of wine, or half a pint of beer). Men should not drink more than 3 – 4 units a day.



But alcohol can be a problem. Drinking too much alcohol can make people behave violently, for example, they start fighting in the street. It can also cause health problems, such as damage to your liver or your stomach.



Alcohol and the law

In the UK it is illegal for someone under 18 to buy alcohol, and it is illegal to sell alcohol to someone who is under 18.

Cigarettes

Many young people start smoking because they see their friends smoking and want to feel they are part of the group. However, cigarettes are also very unhealthy and are very addictive. They cause lung cancer and heart attacks, and they also cost a lot of money.



Cigarettes and the law

In the UK it is illegal to buy cigarettes if you are under 18, and it is illegal to sell cigarettes to someone who is under 18.

For more help

If you or someone in your family has a problem with drugs, alcohol or cigarettes it is a good idea to talk to your doctor about this. He or she will be able to tell you where you can get more help.