



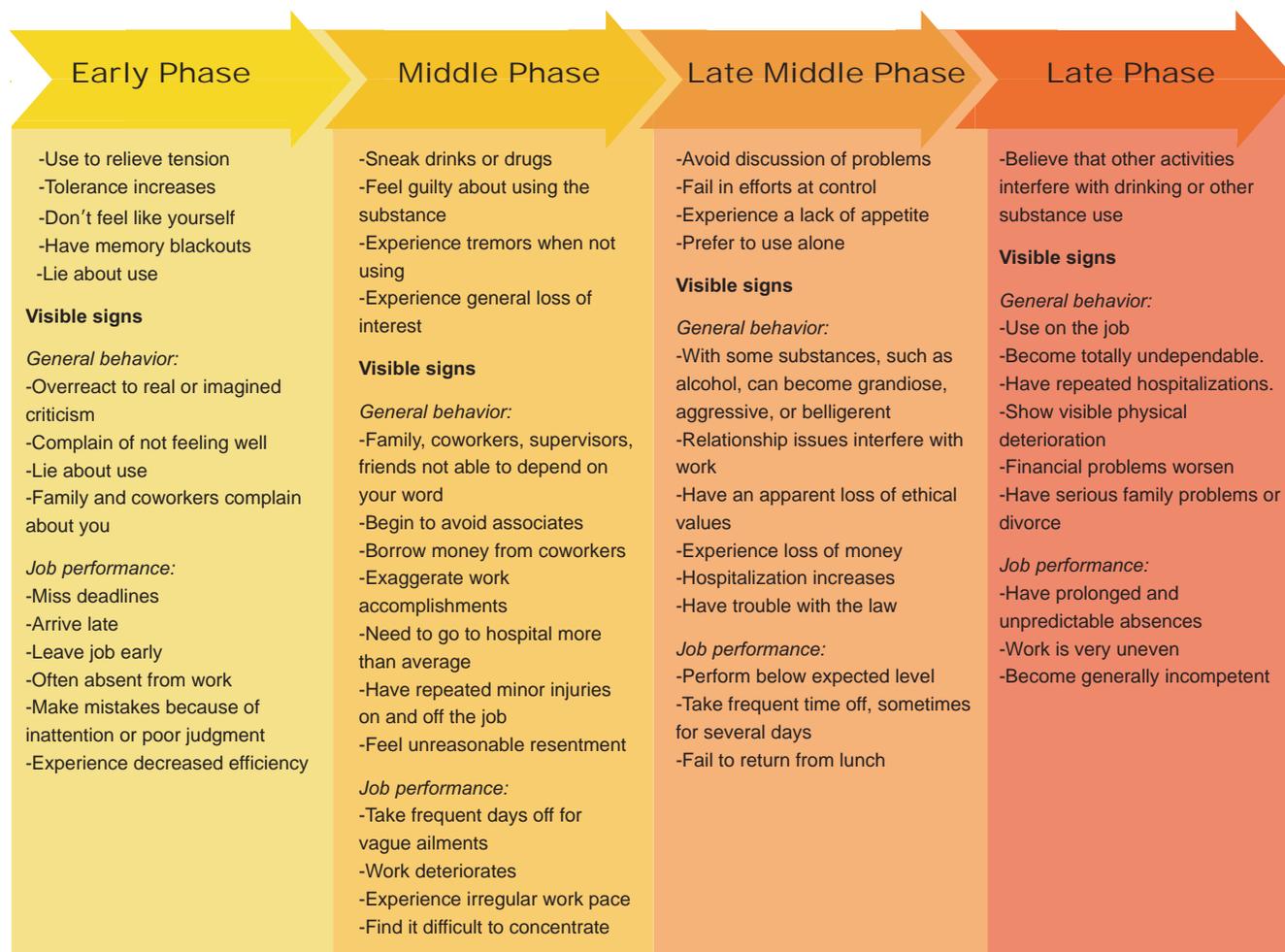
# Effects of Alcohol and Other Drugs on Job Performance and Family

**FACT SHEET**

Some people think about their use of alcohol or other drugs, but they are not convinced they have a problem. Other people are secretly concerned, but they minimize the extent of the problem by blaming other people or circumstances. Still others realize they have a problem—perhaps family members or employers have told them that they “need some help”—but they aren’t sure how serious it is or what help is available.

This fact sheet presents some of the possible effects of alcohol and other drug use. It presents them by phases of use—early, middle, late middle, and late phases<sup>1</sup>—and it emphasizes the visible signs in general behavior and job performance for each phase. The fact sheet does not, however, provide a way for you to diagnose whether you have an alcohol or drug problem, or the seriousness of a problem. You should not assume a diagnosis of alcoholism or other addiction, even if you are experiencing some of the visible signs and symptoms<sup>2</sup> listed below.

The struggle for answers about alcohol and drug problems can be difficult. Without expert assessment and diagnosis, it can entail an exhausting search without easy resolution. But confidential diagnosis and assistance can be helpful at any point along the continuum, and it is better to seek and get such help sooner rather than later.



If you recognize yourself in any of these indicators, perhaps it is time to get help.

There are confidential ways to determine if you need help and, if so, where to get it. See the fact sheet Workplace Substance Abuse Prevention Resources Reference List and the brochure Using Your Employee Assistance Program (both in this book).

## References

<sup>1</sup> The following effects on job and family were adapted from the U.S. Department of Labor. See <http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/drugs/workingpartners/materials/symptoms.asp/>.

<sup>2</sup> In general, the mood effects of many drugs fall into two categories. Some drugs are downers; they make people feel tired, listless, dull, uninterested in things, or quite depressed. Many others are stimulants; they make people anxious, jittery, unable to sleep, panicky, or fearful. This fact sheet is intended as an overview.



# Health Effects of Alcohol and Other Drugs on Your Body

**FACT SHEET**

Use of illegal substances, misuse of prescription drugs, and heavy use of alcohol pose risks to well-being, as they affect various aspects of one's life—family, work, personal goals, legal issues, personal safety, self-esteem, energy, outlook. Illicit drug use can undermine efforts to adopt and maintain salutary behaviors such as smoking cessation, regular exercise, weight management, and healthy eating.<sup>1</sup> And it can adversely affect work performance, by contributing to an inability to follow through on tasks and by increasing illnesses, absences, accidents, and injuries.

There are risks associated with the chronic use of all psychoactive drugs, including alcohol. Adverse health effects can range from nausea and anxiety to coma and death. A pregnant woman who uses alcohol, cigarettes, or other drugs exposes her fetus to serious risks, including low birth weight, brain damage—even miscarriage.

Substance abuse may involve not only controlled substances and illegal drugs but also alcohol and other substances that pose health risks. Described below are some of the health effects of alcohol and other drugs. Please note that when drugs are used in combination their negative effects on the mind and body are often multiplied beyond the effects of the same drugs taken singly.

## Alcohol

Alcohol is the drug most frequently abused on college campuses and in the rest of our society.<sup>2</sup> Risks to both health and well-being attend heavy alcohol use over time.

Nearly 17 million Americans meet the diagnostic criteria for alcoholism.<sup>3</sup> Individuals suffering from the disease of alcoholism, or alcohol dependence syndrome, cannot safely drink alcohol.<sup>4</sup> Health problems associated with long-term heavy drinking include

- ✓ Alcohol-related liver disease (alcoholic hepatitis; alcoholic cirrhosis). More than 2 million Americans suffer from it.<sup>5</sup>
- ✓ Heart disease. Heavy drinking increases the risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke.<sup>6</sup>
- ✓ Cancer. Heavy drinking increases the risk for cancer of the esophagus, mouth, throat, and voice box.<sup>7</sup>
- ✓ Pancreatitis. Long-term heavy drinking can lead to inflammation of the pancreas. This condition can be fatal.<sup>8</sup>
- ✓ Birth defects. Alcohol consumption is the leading cause of preventable retardation. Pregnant women cannot safely drink any amount of alcohol owing to the threat of injuring the development of the unborn child and causing fetal alcohol syndrome.<sup>9</sup>

## Cannabis

Cannabis, the most widely used illicit drug,<sup>10</sup> produces the psychoactive tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC. The most commonly used form of cannabis is the leaves and flowering tops (buds), which may be either smoked or eaten. It also comes in a more concentrated resinous form called hashish and as a sticky black liquid called hash oil. Common names include marijuana, pot, weed, grass, mary jane, dope, doobie, bud, ganja, hashish, hash, reefer, sinsemilla, herb, Aunt Mary, skunk, boom, kif, gangster, chronic, 420. Health problems, exacerbated over duration and frequency of use, can include the following:

- ✓ Chronic sore throat
- ✓ Emphysema-like symptoms<sup>11</sup>
- ✓ Accelerated heart rate, increased blood pressure, and reduced oxygen-carrying capacity of blood leading to increased risk of heart failure<sup>12</sup>
- ✓ Lowered immune system response<sup>13</sup>
- ✓ Depression<sup>14</sup>
- ✓ Anxiety<sup>15</sup>
- ✓ Personality disturbances<sup>16</sup>

For more information, go to <http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/marijuana.html/>.



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## Club Drugs

The term club drugs is used to describe psychoactive drugs that became linked with dance clubs and raves. The class of drugs includes MDMA/ecstasy (methylenedioxymethamphetamine), Rohypnol (flunitrazepam), GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate), and ketamine (ketamine hydrochloride). Owing to variations in purity, potency, and concentration, no club drug is safe. Research indicates that these drugs can cause serious health problems. They can have even more serious consequences when mixed with alcohol. Club drugs are also occasionally used or administered in connection with sexual assault.<sup>17</sup>

For more information, go to <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/club/index.html/>.

## Stimulants

Cocaine, amphetamines, and other stimulants can cause agitation, loss of appetite, irregular heartbeat, chronic sleeplessness, and hallucinations. Cocaine and crack cocaine are extremely dangerous and psychologically and physically addictive. An overdose can result in seizures and death.<sup>18</sup>

## Depressants

Barbiturates, benzodiazepines (such as Valium), Quaaludes, and other depressants cause disorientation, slurred speech, and other behaviors associated with drunkenness. The effects of an overdose of depressants range from shallow breathing, clammy skin, dilated pupils, and weak and rapid pulse to coma and death.

## Hallucinogens

Hallucinogens such as LSD, MDA, PCP (angel dust), mescaline, salvia, and peyote can cause powerful distortions in perception and thinking. Intense and often unpredictable emotional reactions can trigger panic attacks or psychotic reaction. An overdose of hallucinogens can cause heart failure, lung failure, coma, and death.<sup>19</sup>

## Narcotics

Heroin, codeine, morphine, methadone, and opium are narcotics. A high likelihood exists of developing a physical and psychological dependence on these drugs. Health effects include anxiety, mood swings, nausea, confusion, constipation, and respiratory depression.<sup>20</sup> Overdose may lead to convulsions, coma, and death. The risk of being infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, or other diseases increases significantly if one injects drugs and shares needles.<sup>21</sup>

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# Workplace Substance Abuse Statistics

**FACT SHEET**

Use of illicit drugs, alcohol abuse, and misuse of prescription drugs can have negative effects on our daily lives. And people with drug and alcohol problems are not likely to leave those problems behind when they come to work.

- ✓ About three fourths of those 18 and older who use illegal drugs also work.<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Nonmedical use of prescription drugs is national problem. According to the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 7 million Americans were current users of psychotherapeutic drugs taken nonmedically.<sup>2</sup> SAMHSA's Drug Abuse Warning Network reported that of the nearly 2 million drug-related emergency department visits in 2004, over 25 percent were related to nonmedical use of prescription and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals.<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ In a large study of illicit drug use in a highly educated workforce, 42 percent of respondents reported using mood-altering prescription drugs.<sup>4</sup>
- ✓ Most binge drinkers and heavy alcohol users are employed. Of adult binge drinkers, 79.4 percent are employed either full or part time. Of adult heavy drinkers, 79.2 percent are employed.<sup>5</sup>
- ✓ Over 7 percent of American workers drink during the workday, mostly at lunch. Even more—9 percent—have nursed a hangover in the workplace.<sup>6</sup>
- ✓ In a 2002 survey of health-related behaviors among military personnel, over 17 percent reported loss of productivity attributable to alcohol.<sup>7</sup>
- ✓ Drinking does not have to occur on the job to affect the job. Hangovers account for many workplace productivity losses.<sup>8</sup>
- ✓ Workers in construction and mining, wholesale, and retail industries are 25 percent to 45 percent more likely to have a serious alcohol problem than the average U.S. worker.<sup>9</sup>
- ✓ Workplace alcohol use and impairment affect an estimated 15 percent of U.S. workers, or 19.2 million Americans.<sup>10</sup>
- ✓ On-the-job drug use can lead to an increased risk of accidents and injuries.<sup>11, 12</sup> It can also lead to lower levels of productivity and employee morale, not only among those with substance abuse problems but also among those working alongside them.<sup>13</sup>
- ✓ The addictions of coworkers' family members may also affect the workplace. In a national survey of employees, more than one third said that at least one of their coworkers had been distracted, less productive, or absent from work because of alcohol or other drug addiction in their family.<sup>14</sup>



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