

SEARCH the risks of DRUGS

De Sleutel

De Sleutel is the largest organisation in Belgium providing support, care and prevention for drug problems. This brochure gives you information on legal and illegal drugs in Belgium. It is certainly not sufficient on this topic. Look for more information in the services you know, on the internet. But most of all: TALK about drugs and ask your questions to friends, family, teachers, health workers.

Clear and correct information

The first need of anyone concerning drugs and addiction is clear information. We don't want to shout a message loudly in your ear with this folder. We give you a view on the effects of drugs, which are very often positive effects. But also on the risks. Maybe you are going through a stressful period, feel depressed or are unsure what will happen in the future. Risks are then easily set aside, because they are often on long term. But if you are doing a lot of effort right now to live or survive more in comfort, don't destroy all your efforts with taking severe health risks.

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Young people are extra vulnerable for drug dependence. Their body is not yet developed. But also their competences to make difficult decisions, to be careful, to set a limit are not ready yet. Drinking a glass of alcohol, smoking a cigarette, taking medicines are behaviours that children see around them. Sometimes they copy it. Therefore you must be aware of your model status in this

sense. Together with this brochure we publish a little story-book to read with your children. The word 'drug' is not printed in the book. But together you can find out how the social skills and lifeskills are related to smoking, drinking and the use of drugs. The start of a dialogue.

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SEARCH the risks of TOBACCO

What is the effect of tobacco?

Cigarettes contain nicotine. This makes the smoker awake and alert. It gives you a cheerful feeling. But for some people it is at the same time calming them down. It sometimes satisfies hunger a little bit. If you inhale the smoke the nicotine goes in a few seconds to your brains. There it causes the production of more adrenaline. Adrenaline increases your heartbeat, narrows the veins and pushes your blood pressure up. The effects remain for approximately 30 minutes.

What are the risks?

Narrowing your veins and raising your blood pressure increase your chance, later, on painful limbs, a brain tumor or a heart attack. The tar that cigarettes contain too are a risk for your breathing system. Tar disturbs the work of the hairs in your mucus. Therefore you must cough by yourself small pieces of dirt and phlegm. If you do that a lot ever more damage is done in your lungs. You have more chance to get pneumonia and lung cancer.



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Also your immediate surrounding has a smoke together with you. Co-smokers have 20% more chance to get lung cancer. Also children playing or sleeping in the same room where you are. Passive smoking is, just like smoking, harmful for the unborn child. The foetus grows more slowly and the average birth weight is lower.

Addicted?

Smoking is very addictive. Especially because your body gets used to it immediately. You have to smoke more to get the same feeling, much faster than you think. If you don't do that, you have withdrawal symptoms: you feel restless because you don't have the cheerful feeling of the cigarette any more. The effect of calming you down many people experience is nothing else than the disappearance of the withdrawal symptoms, actually caused by smoking.

SEARCH the risks of ALCOHOL

What is the effect of alcohol?

One or two glasses make you alert, relaxed, happy. Your heartbeat and breathing speed go up. Drinking more makes you more careless. You will estimate a situation more difficult, you react more slowly, the coordination of muscles doesn't go well. More alcohol causes uncontrolled movements. Looking, walking and talking go difficultly. Some people feel down. Alcohol works faster for women, because they have on the average less liquid in their body. The alcohol reaches faster a higher promillage. Just like with young people.

What are the risks?

Your liver has a lot of extra work with alcohol and drinking a lot can damage it definitively. Also your brains and nervesystem are at risk by drinking a lot of alcohol. It can happen that you don't remember things that have just happened. Later on whole periods appear that you forget, you find something out to fill up these 'holes'. This decreased memory competence by drinking too much can get worse until the serious Korsakov-syndrome and early demention. There is a clear connection between alcohol and cancer of mouth and throat.

In Belgium people often drink in cafés, in nightlife, during dinner. A family with a different background often has other drinking habits. In



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some cultures you don't drink often, but indeed a lot in one time. At a party you drink in that case as much as someone else during a whole week. This causes other risks: you are drunk, get a hangover, your body has to process and remove a sudden high dose of alcohol. For the young people at home that see and copy your habits it is extra difficult to combine this little piece of family culture with the Belgian culture.

5 alcoholtips

1. Drink maximally 15 to 20 glasses per week (dose for an average weight man)
2. Drink at least 2 days no alcohol at all
3. Drink only alcohol for your pleasure and not to 'drink something away'
4. Drink only in leisure time and not during work or school
5. Don't drink if you are or want to become pregnant



SEARCH the risks of **AMPHETAMINES** **What are the effects of amphetamines?**

Speed or other amphetamines make you happy, active, alert and self-assured. Talking will go easier and quicker. You will have the ability to keep awake longer, feelings of hunger and tiredness disappear. Physical and psychological performances seem to be better. Your heartbeat and temperature rise, pupils get bigger, muscles are more tensed so that you will get stiff cheeks, tics in your face and clenching teeth. The effects will start 15 to 20 minutes after taking a pill, until 4 to 8 hours.

What are the risks?

Amphetamines are mentally addictive: you need ever more to reach the same effect, and if you stop or decrease using, you feel sick. And in a minor phase you don't amuse yourself at a party without stimulating drugs. If used regularly you may have problems with sleeping, eating, feeling dizzy and restless, headache, heavy heartbeats, transpiration. Amphetamines increase the body temperature. Just like with XTC it can lead to overheating of the body: a very dangerous and difficult to handle situation. At bigger techno- or rave parties it is not unusual that a few people have to be brought to the emergency unit in such accidents. Using amphetamines mean an extra load for your heart.

Together with XTC, one of the biggest risks is that there are so many different sorts pills on the market, that you cannot know what the exact composition is. Sometimes the pill looks about the same as the one last time, but the dose is bigger. Or smaller, so that you take an extra one.



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With your older children you must discuss the use of amphetamines or XTC in discotheques and at parties. Whatever your education, culture or background is, it will never be an easy debate.

Drugs are used for pleasure. You cannot simply dictate how to reach pleasure. It is, in our society of open communication, a matter of balancing effects and risks.



SEARCH the risks of CANNABIS

What is the effect of cannabis?

Hash relaxes and makes you careless. The way you perceive things changes, so colours become more intense and music appears more beautiful. Your feeling for time and space changes. Fantasy is stimulated. Concentrating on things that do not really interest you becomes more difficult. The same with logical thinking. Sometimes you forget things that just appeared. You have more appetite, especially for sweet food. THC (the active element in cannabis) has a weakening effect on your muscles. Therefore your legs and arms seem to be heavy. Your mouth is dry, your eyes become red, your heartbeat increases.

What are the risks?

You do not need more hash every time to reach the same effect. But it does occur that people increase their use because they want to be stoned more often. You may get restless and sleep worse after heavy use. The most important risk of cannabis is the use when you want to blow problems away. You seem to have an easy portable tool to feel better. But after a while (a few years, sometimes) you find out that nothing really has changed. In many cases heavier use or addiction starts at that point.

Smoking hash or weed is harmful for your lungs. The way it is often smoked (inhaling deep and keeping the smoke in) causes extra damage. Sometimes the effects are different than you expected, because of unforeseen circumstances: you might feel afraid or lost. Hash influences your short term memory, concentration and logical thinking competences. Blowing and working or studying do not match. The same for driving.



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Although very much youngsters at secondary school age in Belgium try cannabis, most of them stop this habit after a while. Sometimes after a few years. Heavy use (almost daily) or regular use (weekly or a few times per month) is in many cases an entrance to more harmful drugs. Young pupils from other countries are often very precautionary when they enter the community in Belgium. They don't want to disturb their relation with their school. Once problems occur on the school level, the temptation of cannabis use and, in their vulnerable situations, to other drugs is big.



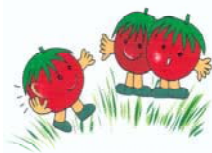
SEARCH the risks of MEDICATION

What are the effects of medication?

Medicines have of course an effect that you know before you take them. They are intended to be of use for something that goes wrong. Some medicines are *psycho-active*. They have an effect on your mind. Sleeping pills, medication to sedate or soften pain or on the other hand to stimulate or wake you up for example. Tranquillizers make you calm and decrease anxiety or a restless feeling. They also make you feel weary, your muscles become weaker. Your body gets used to this kind of medicines very quickly, even in two weeks you often need a bigger dose to reach the same effect.

What are the risks?

The effects and side-effects are written on a thin paper included in the box with the medication. The language is, however, even if you understand Flemish, hard to understand. If you feel better after a while and you haven't finished the full package, the medicines prescribed for your specific illness stays in your house. If someone else in your family is ill, you easily use the same medicines. They may have an unknown dangerous influence on this family member. Certainly when it concerns psycho-active medication. Side-effects of long use may be strong headache, feeling tired or depressed, no clear sight. Sedative medicines can also sedate feelings like happiness, love and laughter. On longer term they cause psychological dependence: not your body, but your mind needs medication.



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Belgium has the doubtful honour of leading the European peleton in easy prescription of psychoactive medication. If you are used to a country where medication is hard to obtain and prescribed only in exceptional cases, you must be extra careful. Ask the doctor what the prescribed medication is intended for. If you buy or receive the medicines, ask to translate and explain the included information. Never

give psychoactive medication to someone else. Never use or give them to a family member without clear consult of a doctor.

