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Teens: Smoking, Alcohol & Drugs

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Each year hundreds of thousands of young people engage in risky and negative behaviors. This can range from trying a cigarette for the first time to becoming addicted to prescription drugs. From tobacco to alcohol and drugs, youth are exposed to and have easy access to unhealthy and illegal substances that can have detrimental, sometimes fatal consequences.

Smoking An estimated 4,500,000 children and adolescents smoke in the United States. Approximately 5,000 to 6,000 young people try their first cigarette each day. Smoking is very unhealthy. Most people know that it can cause lung cancer later in life. But many may not know some of the immediate effects. It can stain teeth, cause bad breath, increase respiratory problems, reduce the rate of lung growth and decrease physical fitness performance and endurance. It also effects the health of others around them.

Smoking is very addictive. That means it can be very difficult to stop even if a person tries very hard. The best advice is “never start.”

Marijuana Marijuana, frequently referred to as “pot,” “weed,” “Mary Jane,” “blunt,” or “joint” is a very popular illegal drug. Smoking marijuana can affect nerve cells in the brain, cause short-term memory loss and can affect other aspects of your health.

Chewing Tobacco Chewing tobacco also is unhealthy. It can cause diseases and cancer of the mouth, bad breath, discolored teeth and lots of

other problems. It is very addictive.

Alcohol Drinking and doing drugs impair judgment significantly. This puts teens and others in great danger. The overwhelming majority of accidents that occur during the teen years are thought to be alcohol or drug related. Many of these accidents lead to serious injuries and in some cases death. Peers will sometimes encourage others to drink and drive or individuals will feel like they can drive even though they have been drinking. If you are a teen, don’t do it! The real “leader” of the group will make healthy, safe choices. He or she will also encourage others to engage in safe practices.

“Date Rape” Drugs Rohypnol, frequently called the “date rape” drug, “roofies,” “roachies,” “Poor Man’s Quaalude,” and “forget-me pill” can leave a young woman extremely vulnerable. It is odorless and has no taste. Therefore, it can be easily slipped into a drink. Once it is taken, an individual is virtually helpless to resist rape and other unwanted advances and attacks.

GHB (gamma-hydroxybutrate) is another “date rape” type drug. Common street names include “Gamma G,” “liquid ecstasy,” “Georgia Home Boy,” “Growth Hormone Booster,” and “Grievous Bodily Harm.” It has effects similar to those listed above. It too has been associated with sexual assault crimes, including rape. The primary way to avoid being a victim is to *never* leave drinks unattended.

Ecstasy Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) is a commonly used drug. Street names include X, E, and Adam. Frequent or high doses can cause damage in the brain's nerve cells. Mixing ecstasy with other drugs or alcohol can have devastating effects. Side effects can include depression, confusion, sleep problems, and in some cases death.

Inhalants Substances and fumes from products such as glue, paint thinner, white out, lighter fluid, and cleaning materials are known as inhalants. When "sniffed" or "inhaled" the fumes create an instant high. These products starve the body of oxygen, cause the heart to beat at very fast and irregular rates and can kill a person instantly. Other side effects include dizziness, slurred speech, headache and decreased performance in school.

Quick Facts for Parents

Teens are more likely to use drugs or alcohol if....

- They think their peers are doing the same thing
- They have poor family relationships
- They live in a household or community where drinking and drug use is tolerated
- They dislike or do not do well in school

Things to Remember if You Are a Teen

- Keep safety first
- Be prepared to say "No"
- Do not give in to peer pressure
- Choices made today can affect the future
- Never be afraid to call a trusted adult for help, it could save your life
- Realize parents set limits to protect you

References

www.cdc.gov

www.familydoctor.org

www.ncadi.samhsa.gov

This *Youth Development* Fact Sheet is part of a series prepared by the Cooperative Extension Program at Tennessee State University.

For more information, contact your local county Agricultural Extension agent (See your telephone blue pages). Printable copies of this fact sheet can be found on our website.

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