

Appendix 2: The nature and addictiveness of commonly used illicit drugs

Drug	What is it?	Desired effect	Addictiveness
Amphetamine	A synthetic drug that can easily be produced on a small scale. It can be snorted, swallowed or smoked or, less frequently, injected.	Stimulant used for a 'buzz' of alertness and energy and the sense that anything is possible. Relieves boredom and tiredness. Effects last for about 6 hours.	People can become dependent on the psychological effects and although amphetamines do not create physical withdrawal, stopping can produce strong feelings of depression and anxiety.
BZP	A synthetic stimulant derived from piperazine, often seen as an alternative to ecstasy or amphetamine, although usually considered to be less potent than these drugs. It is sold as a tablet, capsule, or off-white powder. BZP pills are marketed under a huge variety of names and the tablets come in many different shapes.	Provides a sense of euphoria and increased alertness, enhanced senses and a raised heart rate. Depending on the dose taken, the effects of the drug can last for up to 6-8 hours.	Early studies have suggested that people can become dependent, as is the case with amphetamine use.

Drug	What is it?	Desired effect	Addictiveness
Cannabis	Naturally occurring plant used as leaves ('grass', 'ganja', 'marijuana', 'weed'), resin ('hash', 'hashish') or oil that can be smoked or eaten. There are many different varieties of varying strengths. Around 100 varieties have high levels of the psychoactive component tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). These are often given the generic name 'skunk'.	A mild hallucinogen that also has some sedative and disinhibiting properties. It induces relaxation and heightens the senses. Positive uses to relieve symptoms in chronic illnesses like multiple sclerosis and glaucoma are being actively researched.	There is some evidence of physical dependence associated with cannabis use, which can lead to withdrawal symptoms. It may be psychologically addictive if people depend on it as part of a coping strategy or as a way to relax.
Cocaine	Derived from natural coca leaves. Usually snorted as a powder but can be injected or smoked.	A powerful stimulant to the central nervous system (CNS) and a local anaesthetic. It gives a powerful physical and psychological rush of exhilaration and excitement, alertness, confidence and strength within 3 minutes of ingestion and the effects last 15-40 minutes.	High. Produces psychological dependence, owing to changes in the brain. Does not produce physical dependence to the same degree as heroin, but its physical effects are powerful and withdrawal creates very unpleasant symptoms.

Drug	What is it?	Desired effect	Addictiveness
Crack cocaine	Smoked version of cocaine, derived by 'freebasing': heating cocaine powder with water and a reagent such as baking soda. It is called crack after the crackling sound it makes when smoked using a pipe, glass tube, plastic bottle or foil.	Stimulant. Has the same effect as cocaine, but far more intense: crack makes users feel alive, exhilarated, confident and wide awake. It kills all feelings of pain, tiredness and hunger.	Potentially very high. The very steep high and 'come-down' can produce strong and immediate cravings, which can rapidly develop into a 'binge' pattern of drug use.
Ecstasy	Synthetic drug, derived from the chemical 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA). Usually taken in tablet form.	Stimulant. Gives a rush of alertness and energy and a feeling of being in tune with one's surroundings and other people. The effects can last 3-6 hours.	Not considered to be physically addictive, but it is possible to build up a tolerance and require larger doses to achieve the same effect. It may be psychologically addictive.
GHB/GBL	Synthetic chemicals. Once GBL enters the body, it is rapidly converted to GHB.	Depressant and anaesthetic. Lowers inhibitions and increases libido. Used as a club drug. Associated with date rape.	May produce physical and psychological dependence.

Drug	What is it?	Desired effect	Addictiveness
Heroin	Painkiller derived from the morphine from the opium poppy. It is injected, smoked or snorted. When pure, it is a white powder, but it is usually brownish-white by the time it is sold on the street.	Depressant. Acts to depress the nervous system and slow down body functioning. Users experience a rush, a warm sensation and sense of being cut off from physical and psychological pain.	Very high. No instant dependency, but physical dependence will develop if it is used for a number of days consecutively, even at relatively low levels.
Ketamine	Synthetic chemical, ketamine hydrochloride, found as liquid or tablets.	Anaesthetic. Can produce euphoria at lower doses, hallucinations and out-of-body experiences at higher doses.	May produce psychological dependence. Tolerance develops quickly.
LSD	Synthetic chemical known as LSD or acid. Usually sold as tiny squares of paper, often with pictures on them, but also found as a liquid or as tiny pellets.	Hallucinogen, mind and mood altering effects, which may last up to 8-12 hours, include heightened and altered perception.	Not addictive. Very dose sensitive.
Psilocybin (magic mushrooms)	Mushrooms growing in the wild. There are two main types: <i>Psilocybe/</i> liberty cap and <i>Amanita muscaria/</i> fly agaric. Can be eaten raw, cooked in food or made into tea.	Hallucinogens, producing much the same effects as LSD, only milder.	Not addictive, but tolerance may develop, resulting in increasing use during the short growing season.

Drug	What is it?	Desired effect	Addictiveness
Methamphetamine	Synthetic drug. Can be swallowed as pills, snorted as powder or smoked as crystals.	Stimulant. Produces euphoric effects similar to those of cocaine, but longer lasting.	Highly addictive.
Spice (synthetic cannabinoids)	A collection of herbs or plant material that has been sprayed with synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists, and that mimic the psychoactive effects of THC.	When smoked, they produce cannabis-like mild hallucinogenic effects, sedation and relaxation.	Not known to induce physical dependence. As with cannabis, they may be psychologically addictive if people depend on them as part of a coping strategy or as a way to relax.

Source: www.drugscope.org.uk and Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (2007) *Drugs – facing facts*. London: Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

