

mind hk

# Understanding the mental health effect of street drugs

了解街頭 常見危險藥物對於精神健康的影響

Mind HK was founded and is jointly supported by Mind UK and the Patient Care Foundation  
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This booklet is for anyone who wants to know about the effects of street drugs on mental health, including anyone who takes them or has dual diagnosis. It explains how taking street drugs can affect your mental health, and how different types of street drugs can affect your mental health in different ways. It explains different options for help and treatment, and includes information for family and friends.

此本手冊的目的是幫助任何想了解街頭常見危險藥物對於精神健康有何影響的人們（包括正在服用這些毒品或是正在濫用藥物的雙重診斷精神病患），加深他們對這些危險藥物的認識了解。此本手冊會解釋街頭常見危險藥物如何對服用者的精神健康產生影響以及不同的藥物所產生擁有的效果。本此手冊亦會介紹香港現行用的治療方法和相關的協助機構，並為親友提供其他相關資料。

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## What are street drugs?

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### 街頭常見危險藥物是甚什麼是街頭常見危險藥物？

Street drugs are substances people take to give themselves a pleasurable experience, or to help them feel better if they are having a bad time, or simply because their friends are using them. They include heroin, cocaine, cannabis, alcohol and some prescribed medicines.

Street drugs may be:

- legal – such as caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.
- illegal – this means it is against the law to have them or supply them to other people. Most street drugs are illegal.
- controlled – these are drugs used in medicine, such as benzodiazepines (see p.9). It is legal to take controlled drugs if a doctor has given you a prescription for them, but it is illegal to have them if not. It is also illegal to give or sell them to anyone else

The way street drugs are legally classified does not reflect how harmful they are to your mental health. Illegal, controlled and legal drugs can all have a negative impact on you, whatever class (A, B or C) they are given.

## How can street drugs affect your mental health?

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### 街頭常見危險藥物如何影響對精神健康產生影響？

All street drugs have some kind of effect on your mental health. They affect the way you see things, your mood and your behaviour.

These effects may be pleasant or unpleasant. They might be shortlived, or you may experience longer-lasting effects. In some cases, these effects may be similar to those you experience as part of a mental health problem. They may go away once the drug has worn off, or they may not, and you may experience longer-lasting effects.

For some people, taking street drugs can also lead to long-term mental health problems, such as depression and schizophrenia.

It is difficult to predict how you will react to a street drug. You may react differently to the same drug at different times or in different situations. This may differ depending on:

- the type of drug
- whether the drug has been mixed with other substances, and what these other substances are the amount you take
- the environment or social situation in which you take it
- how often you take it
- your previous experience of it
- what you want and expect to happen your mental state.

If you have a history of experiencing poor mental health, this may mean you are more likely to experience negative effects if you take street drugs. However, if you have previously had no mental health problems, you may still develop symptoms of a mental health problem from using these drugs.

If you take street drugs a lot, or become dependent on them, this can have a negative impact on your day-to-day life. For example, it could lead to:

- financial problems
- problems with education and employment
- relationship problems
- problems with housing
- low self-esteem
- finding it hard to maintain commitments, including appointments related to your drug use or mental health
- crime – either in possessing an illegal substance, or to finance a habit, leading to a criminal record
- imprisonment.

## Dual diagnosis

If you have both mental health problems and problems with drug or alcohol use, you may be described as having dual diagnosis. There is no standardised treatment for dual diagnosis, because it includes a large number of possible problems, and involves both drug and alcohol services and mental health services. If you have this combination of problems, you may need help with many different parts of your life. (See 'What treatments are available?' on p.2- and 'What support services are available?' on p.22 for more information.)

## What are the mental health effects of different drugs?

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### 不同的危險藥物對於精神造成方面的具體效果

There are four main groups of street drugs, divided according to their major effects, plus a few substances that do not easily fit into any category. The main categories are:

- stimulants
- depressants
- opium-related painkillers
- hallucinogens.

The mental health effects listed in this section are all possible effects of each drug. This doesn't mean that you will definitely experience these effects. Nor is it right to assume that someone showing the symptoms listed here must be taking drugs.

All of these drugs can also cause physical side effects, some of which can be unpleasant or even dangerous. For more information about physical effects of street drugs, see the Frank or Erowid websites. (See 'Useful contacts' on p.25.)

If you take street drugs, remember that you don't always know what is in them so it can be difficult to predict how you will react. They may not contain any of the substance you are expecting, and could also contain harmful substances.

## Alcohol

### 酒精

Alcohol is the most toxic of the commonly used drugs, but moderate use is not usually a problem. The long-term effects listed are associated with drinking a lot over a long period of time. These effects will go away if you stop drinking.

If you think you may be addicted to alcohol and want to give up, get all the advice and information you need and seek medical help if possible – it can be dangerous to stop drinking suddenly.

Type of drug Depressant

Short-term effects:

- Feeling relaxed and more sociable to begin with
- As the depressant effect sets in, you may need to drink more in order to recreate these pleasant effects
- Large amounts can cause uninhibited behaviour or aggression

Long-term effects :

- Short-term memory loss
- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Difficulty with problem-solving
- Poor concentration
- Addiction
- Dependency and withdrawal symptoms
- Anxiety

- Delirium (which may include confusion, disorientation and hallucinations)

### Amphetamines; methylamphetamine (crystal meth)

#### 安非他明/甲基安非他明 (冰毒)

The effects of crystal meth are similar to crack cocaine, but they last longer. For more information, see 'Crack cocaine' on p.12. If you have experience of a mental health problem, you are more likely to experience negative effects.

Type of drug: Stimulant

Short-term effects:

- Increased attention and alertness
- Reduced tiredness
- Increased energy and confidence

Long-term effects:

- Agitation
- Confusion
- Aggression
- Can cause symptoms of psychosis, such as paranoia
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Tiredness
- Irritability

### Anabolic steroids

#### 合成代謝類固醇

Anabolic steroids are taken to increase muscle bulk and enhance sporting performance. The short- and long-term effects of steroids will disappear if you stop taking them. However, the symptoms of dependency may

continue.

Type of drug: Stimulant

Short and long-term effects:

- Aggression
- Dramatic mood swings
- Confusion
- Sleeping problems
- Depression
- Paranoia
- Symptoms of dependency
- Extreme tiredness
- Depression

### Benzodiazepines

#### 苯並二氮草類鎮靜劑

Benzodiazepines are prescribed for anxiety and as sleeping pills (see Mind's online booklet Making sense of sleeping pills and minor tranquillisers). People take them illegally to increase the effects of similar drugs, such as alcohol or opiates, to counteract the effects of stimulants, such as ecstasy or amphetamines, or to help with stopping smoking. Benzodiazepines can be very addictive, and stopping taking them can be very difficult.

Type of drug: Depressant

Short-term effects Negative effects:

- Feeling agitated
- Aggression
- Feeling hostile

Positive effects:

- Reduced tension and anxiety
- Lucidity
- Feeling calm and relaxed
- Dependency and withdrawal symptoms
- Sleeping problems
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Heightened senses

## Buprenorphine

### 丁丙諾啡

Heroin addiction is often treated with buprenorphine or methadone. Buprenorphine (trade name Temgesic) is less sedating than methadone, and so may be preferable if you are working, or if you drive.

Type of drug: Opium-related painkiller/depressant

Short- and long-term effects:

- Depression
- Loss of libido
- Hallucinations and other symptoms of psychosis
- Feelings of detachment

## Caffeine

### 咖啡因

Caffeine is present in drinks that most people have every day, such as coffee and tea. It is also present in chocolate, and is added to some manufactured drinks such as colas. You can buy it in tablet form too.

Type of drug: Stimulant

Short- and long-term effects

- Agitation
- Finding it difficult to relax

### Cannabis (marijuana, hemp, hashish, grass, skunk)

#### 大麻/大麻樹脂

People take cannabis as a way of relaxing and getting high. The effects you experience will largely depend on whether you are used to taking the drug, how much you take and the type of cannabis you use. If you have experience of anxiety and depression, you are more likely to experience negative side effects.

Type of drug: Stimulant, depressant and hallucinogen

Short-term effects:

- Feeling relaxed
- Talkative
- Finding things very funny and laughing a lot
- Feeling excited by the things you see, hear and feel
- Hunger

High doses may cause:

- Distorted perceptions
- Forgetfulness
- Distress and confusion
- Psychotic experiences (hallucinations and other experiences which other people don't share)

Long-term effects:

- Long-lasting symptoms of psychosis that may be diagnosed as schizophrenia
- May cause depression in later life if you use it a lot as a teenager

## Cocaine, crack cocaine

### 可卡因 (霹靂可卡因)

Cocaine comes in two forms: cocaine powder which is snorted, and crack cocaine which is smoked. Both forms may be injected. Cocaine is notoriously impure, and often contains other substances. Cocaine is extremely addictive, and it is very difficult to stop taking it. If you have a mental health problem, cocaine can make this worse.

Type of drug: Stimulant

Short-term effects:

- Feeling wide awake
- Full of energy
- Feeling confident

High doses may cause

- Hallucinations and delusions
- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts

Long-term effects:

Depression

- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Paranoia
- Irreversible brain damage
- A worsening of pre-existing mental health problems
- Dependency and withdrawal symptoms
- Loss of energy
- Psychosis
- Depression
- Akathisia (a feeling of intense restlessness)

## Ecstasy (MDMA)

### 搖頭丸/忘我 (MDMA)

Ecstasy tablets are notoriously impure, and often contain substances other than MDMA.

Type of drug: Stimulant

Short-term effects:

- Feeling happy and relaxed
- Feelings of empathy, openness, caring and emotional closeness to others

Long-term effects

- Depression, which does not respond to antidepressants
- Loss of confidence
- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Agitation and teeth clenching
- Panic attacks after repeated use
- Hallucinations and paranoia after repeated high doses

## Heroin (diamorphine)

### 海洛因 (二醋嗎啡)

The main effects of heroin are pain relief, and euphoria – but also depression. It is a painkiller, prescribed as diamorphine. Many drug treatment programmes are geared to helping people who are addicted to heroin and other opioid drugs. Naltrexone (Nalorex) is a prescribed drug that eliminates the positive experiences associated with opioid use. If you are being treated for heroin addiction, naltrexone may be prescribed to help you stay off it. The main problems arise because it is very addictive.

Type of drug : Opium related painkiller/depressant

Short-term effects:

- A rush of pleasure, followed by a calm, warm, dreamy contentment
- Drowsiness
- Talkativeness
- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia
- Lethargy

#### Long-term effects

- Loss of appetite
- Apathy
- Neglect of personal safety and hygiene
- Generalised pain when the level of drug in your system drops
- Dependency and withdrawal symptoms
- A craving that leads to serious social problems including crime
- Severe physical withdrawal symptoms
- A tolerance of the drug, which means you need to take more of it to achieve the same effect

### Ketamine

#### 氯胺酮 (K仔毒品)

Ketamine is an anaesthetic, mainly used in animals. It is similar to PCP (see p.18).

#### Type of drug Hallucinogen

#### Short-term effects

- Poor concentration
- Changed perception of surroundings – things not looking right or not feeling right
- Feeling out of touch with reality and with your surroundings
- Delusions
- Paranoia
- Dream-like states

- Nightmares
- Feeling you have no thoughts
- A bad trip may make you violent, suicidal or likely to harm yourself

Long-term effects:

- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Depression
- Panic attacks
- Anxiety
- Dependence and withdrawal symptoms
- Tiredness
- Depression

Khat

阿拉伯茶（巧茶）

Khat is a green, leafy plant that has been chewed in East Africa for thousands of years. Khat is illegal in some parts of the world.

Type of drug: Stimulant

Short-term effects:

- Feeling elated and energetic
- Not being able to sleep
- Loss of appetite
- Relaxation
- Feeling sociable
- Hearing voices (associated with high doses)
- Paranoia (associated with high doses)
- Dependence and withdrawal symptoms
- Tiredness
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability

## LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide)

麦麥角酸二乙胺（黑芝麻、FING霸）

LSD is a synthetic drug that was first made in the 1940s. It causes random and sometimes frightening effects which may be delayed. As LSD causes you to hallucinate and lose touch with your surroundings, it can cause people to do dangerous things. In some cases, people have died due to dangerous behaviour as a result of taking LSD.

Type of drug : Hallucinogen

Short-term effects:

- Detachment from surroundings
- Altered sense of space and time
- Hallucinations
- Feelings of insight, mysticism and spirituality
- Feeling you can fly
- Anxiety (associated with a bad trip)
- Feeling panicky (associated with a bad trip)

Long-term effects:

- Likely to make existing symptoms of schizophrenia worse
- Flashbacks of bad trips, when you feel you are reliving them again

## Mephedrone (do not confuse with methadone – see p.18)

甲氧麻黃酮（喵喵）

Mephedrone is similar to amphetamines and also to the active ingredients of khat.

Type of drug: Stimulant

Short-term effects

- Agitation
- Hallucinations (hearing and seeing things and also strange touch sensations)

- Paranoid delusions (even if you are taking antipsychotic medication)
- Depression
- Suicidal feelings

## Methadone 美沙酮 (蜜瓜汁)

Heroin addiction is often treated with methadone or buprenorphine, which are both prescribed as heroin substitutes.

Methadone has similar effects to heroin, but they are milder and longer lasting, so it stops you going through withdrawal, and doesn't give you the initial high.

Type of drug: Opium-related drug/depressant

Side effects:

- Mood changes
- Hallucinations
- Restlessness

## Nicotine

You would not normally experience mental health effects from using nicotine. However, it is extremely addictive, and if you stop having nicotine it can cause negative effects.

Type of drug: Stimulant

Dependence and withdrawal symptoms

- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Depression

## Phencyclidine (PCP)

### 苯環利定 (天使塵)

PCP is an anaesthetic, mainly used in animals. It is similar to ketamine (see p.15). The symptoms you experience from taking PCP may be confused with schizophrenia.

Type of drug: Hallucinogen

Short-term effects:

- Poor concentration
- Changed perception of surroundings – things not looking right or not feeling right
- Feeling out of touch with reality and with your surroundings
- Delusions
- Paranoia
- Dream-like states  
Nightmares
- Feeling you have no thoughts
- Feeling violent (associated with a bad trip)
- Feeling suicidal or wanting to self-harm (associated with a bad trip)

Long-term effects

- Depression
- Long-lasting psychosis
- Dependence and withdrawal symptoms
- Depression

## Psilocybin/psilocyn (magic mushrooms)

### 裸蓋菇素/裸頭草辛 (迷幻蘑菇)

The effects of magic mushrooms are similar to LSD (see p.16).

Type of drug: Hallucinogen

Short-term effects:

- Hallucinations – these may be pleasant or frightening

## Solvents

### 溶劑

Solvents, glues, gases and aerosols are used mainly by a small percentage of young people, usually only for a short period.

Type of drug: Depressant

#### Short-term effects

- Feelings similar to getting drunk
- Dizziness
- Feeling unreal
- Euphoria
- Loss of inhibition
- Pseudo-hallucinations (hallucinations that you know are not real)
- Repeated sniffing can cause a hangover effect, making you pale, very tired, forgetful and unable to concentrate

Dependence • Rare

## Do psychiatric drugs and street drugs affect each other?

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### 精神治療藥物與街頭常見危險藥物會否互相互產生影響？

When two or more drugs are taken at the same time, they are likely to interact with one another, so that one drug changes the effects of the other. One or both of them may become toxic, or their effects may be decreased or increased. Your age, weight, genes, general health and liver or kidney function will make a difference to the way the drugs work. However, there are some common interactions that many people experience.

For example:

- MAOI (monoamine oxidase inhibitors) antidepressants – phenelzine,

isocarboxazid and tranylcypromine – interact with many substances to cause very dangerous effects. These include high blood pressure, chest pain, neck stiffness, rigid muscles, flushing, vomiting and severe headaches.

- The antidepressant moclobemide (a reversible MAOI) could interact with stimulants, causing effects which may be life-threatening.
- If the antipsychotic chlorpromazine is taken together with amphetamines, the effects of one or both can be reduced.
- The mood stabilisers lithium and carbamazepine may reduce the effects of cocaine. Lithium blocks the effects of amphetamines.
- At very high doses, ketamine reduces respiration rates. If ketamine is taken in combination with other sedatives, respiration rates will reduce more.
- Taking alcohol with most types of antidepressants and antipsychotics increases the sedative effects.

Other interactions may occur and it is very important to remember this. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor or pharmacist about any concerns you have. (See also Mind's booklets on medication in the Making sense of... series.)

## What treatments are available?

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### 現有哪些治療方法？

If you are concerned that your drug use is affecting your mental health, you could go to see a GP, or you may be able to go straight to your local street drugs service. They can discuss any issues, explain your options for treatment and refer you to a specialist if necessary. If you want help to stop taking drugs, you could also contact a drugs organisation for information and support. (See 'Useful contacts' on p.25.)

While you may be anxious about discussing your use of street drugs with your doctor, your treatment is likely to be more successful if they have all the information about your drug use. It's therefore important to be honest about how you use drugs. For example, a doctor may be less likely to

prescribe antipsychotic medication if they know that your psychosis may have been caused by a street drug. (See 'Medication' on p.23.)

Before you start any treatment, your doctor should discuss your options with you, and take your opinions into account.

- all treatment should be person-centred and take into account your individual needs and preferences, as well as your cultural background and any special needs you may have
- you should have a good support worker to coordinate your care plan and build a good therapeutic relationship with you, discussing your options with you
- you should be offered 'motivational interviewing' and 'contingency management', which aim to encourage you to stop taking street drugs
- you should be offered a talking treatment if you are being treated for heroin addiction with methadone, buprenorphine or naltrexone.

## Talking treatments

### 談話治療

Depending on the effects on your mental health, you may be offered psychological therapies, such as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). If you and your partner both use street drugs, you may also be offered couples therapy. (See Mind's booklets Making sense of cognitive behaviour therapy and Making sense of talking treatments.)

## Medication

### 藥物治療

Medication is unlikely to help with mental health problems that are directly caused by your use of alcohol or street drugs. For example, if you experience psychosis as the result of taking a street drug, antipsychotic drugs may not be effective. SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) antidepressants are not effective for treating depression caused by using ecstasy.

But if you already had a diagnosis of a mental health problem before you

## What support services are available?

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### 有哪些協援助服務機構可以提供幫助?

#### Mental health and social services

#### 社會精神健康服務

When seeking help from mental health and social services, it's best to explain as much as you can about your circumstances. This means that they can make a full assessment of your needs, including social needs such as housing, employment and benefits, and refer you for help with these.

If you have severe mental health problems and problematic substance misuse, the Department of Health recommends that mental health services should be responsible for your treatment, rather than drug and alcohol services

One of the biggest problems for people with dual diagnosis is finding somewhere to live. Many housing agencies and supported housing trusts will not accept drug users. However, a number of housing associations and trusts have begun to provide suitable supported schemes.

You may find going to a self-help group useful. At a self-help group, you can talk about your mental health problems and drug use with other people who are having similar experiences. There are many organisations that run self-help groups, including some local Minds. (See 'Useful contacts' on p.25.)

## Support in the criminal justice system

### 刑事司法系統對濫用毒品/藥物者的支援

If you have been in contact with the criminal justice system in association with your use of drugs, this should not make any difference to the type of treatments you are offered. If you are in prison, you may be offered a 'therapeutic community', developed to help people with drug problems in a prison environment.

## Drug and alcohol support services

### 物質成癮治療服務組織

You may be offered help from drug and alcohol support services to encourage you to stop taking drugs. This usually means you are allocated a support worker, and receive quite intensive one-to-one support.

## How can friends and family help?

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### 親友可用什麼方法幫助病人？

This section is for friends and family who want to help someone they know with a mental health problem who also uses street drugs or alcohol. It may also be useful for anyone concerned that a friend or family member is experiencing mental health problems as a result of taking street drugs. If your friend or relative has mental health problems and also takes street drugs or alcohol, it can be very difficult to know how to help them. If they have severe problems, the reality may be that there is a limit to the amount of support you can give and how much you can get them to change. However, there are some things you can do that might be helpful. Encourage them to seek appropriate help

If you are concerned that your friend or family member needs help, encourage them to seek appropriate treatment. This can be difficult, particularly if they are seeking help for the first time, as they may be worried about being judged for their drug use. They may also be

concerned about what will happen if they have been using illegal drugs. You can reassure them that it is OK to seek help, and perhaps help them decide where they might go for support.

### Support them to use services

#### 鼓勵他們自願尋求協助

Your friend or family member may need help to find out what services are available locally. You might also be able to help by supporting them to make the most of the services they are using. For example, you could go to meetings with their support workers and doctors, to help them provide the most suitable care.

### Encourage them to carry on with treatment

#### 支持他們使用不同的協援助服務機構

If they are taking part in a drug treatment programme or receiving a talking treatment, you may be able to encourage them to stick to their treatment plan, go to appointments or meet their targets.

### Spend positive time with them

#### 給予他們精神支持以幫助他們渡完成過治療過程

Let your friend or family member know you are there for them. Listen to them if they want to talk and spend time together, joining in with activities they enjoy.

### Look after yourself

#### 好好照顧好自己

It can be very difficult to try and support someone whose problems are associated with their use of street drugs or alcohol. You may find it helpful to discuss your feelings and concerns with someone else, such as a counsellor, or to join a support group.

## Useful Contacts

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### 有用的聯絡

#### The Cabin Hong Kong

web: <http://www.thecabinhongkong.com.hk/>

#### The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong

##### 香港心理衛生會

tel: 2528 0196

web: [www.mhahk.org.hk](http://www.mhahk.org.hk)

#### United Centre of Emotional Health & Positive Living

##### 聯合情緒健康教育中心

tel: 2349 3212

web: [www.ucep.org.hk](http://www.ucep.org.hk)

#### Institute of Mental Health Castle Peak Hospital

##### 青山醫院精神健康學院

tel: 2466 7350

web: [www3.ha.org.hk](http://www3.ha.org.hk)

#### Amity Mutual Support Society

##### 恆康互助社

tel: 2332 2759

web: [www.amss1996.org.hk](http://www.amss1996.org.hk)

#### HK FamilyLink Mental Health Advocacy Association

##### 香港家連家精神健康倡導協會

tel: 2144 7244

web: [www.familylink.org.hk](http://www.familylink.org.hk)

#### The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong

##### 港撒瑪利亞防止自殺會

tel: 2389 2222

web: [www.sbhk.org.hk](http://www.sbhk.org.hk)

## Further Information

Mind HK was founded and is jointly supported by Mind UK and the Patient Care Foundation.

At the moment Mind HK is limited to website support but with donations we hope to expand the work that is done. Volunteers welcome to contact:

**[mentalhealth@patientcarefoundation.com.hk](mailto:mentalhealth@patientcarefoundation.com.hk)**

Mind Hong Kong 是由 Mind UK 及 Patient Care Foundation Hong Kong 聯合協

辦的機構。在現階段我們只能提供有限度的網上支援。假若有足夠的捐款，我

們會進一步擴大服務範圍。如有興趣參與義工團隊，

請聯絡: [mentalhealth@patientcarefoundation.com.hk](mailto:mentalhealth@patientcarefoundation.com.hk)