



We're not here to judge you. We just want you to stay healthy and safe. That's why we encourage you to really think about whether or not alcohol or drugs have a place in your life.

You probably know people who drink or get high, even though there are risks and can be against the law. Maybe you're curious and have done some experimenting yourself. Or maybe you've decided drinking and getting high aren't for you.

Either way, Kaiser Permanente encourages you to get the facts, and think for yourself as you make these decisions.

Drugs come in many forms.

Drugs are any substance that in small amounts causes significant changes in your body, your mind, or both.

- **Legal drugs:** Some substances, even ones that are harmful, such as cigarettes, are legal for adults. It's possible for many adults to drink alcohol responsibly, in moderate amounts. Other people develop problems with alcohol and shouldn't drink at all.

- **Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medicines:** Some medicines are prescribed by a doctor, and others are for sale at drugstores ("over the counter"). Some people abuse medicines, like painkillers, cough medicines, tranquilizers, or stimulants to get high or stay awake. Many young people think that these drugs are safer than "street drugs," but that's not true. Taking someone else's prescription or abusing any medicine is dangerous and can even be life threatening.
- **Illegal drugs:** You've probably heard about many drugs, like marijuana, meth, mushrooms, cocaine, and ecstasy—just to name a few. These drugs cannot only harm your health, but using them can also get you in trouble with family, school, and the law. (Learn more about the risks of drugs by checking out the reliable resources at the end of this handout.)

Abusing drugs and alcohol can hurt your body, your brain, your relationships, your grades, and your motivation to achieve your goals. **Choosing not to use drugs and alcohol is the best way to keep a clear head, stay safe, protect your health, and achieve your goals.**

Some reasons people drink or get high:

They want to...

- Feel less shy or fit in.
- Have fun with their friends who are doing it.
- Try to seem older or more mature.
- Try to relieve anxiety, stress, or boredom.
- Try to escape sad or angry feelings.
- Feel things that are new and different.
- Try to deal with things like abuse or violence.
- Rebel or do something dangerous.

Making your own decisions

- **Think for yourself.** Decide what you want to do ahead of time and stick to it. Hang out with people whose choices you respect. Ask yourself if using fits in with who you want to be.
- **Don't buy the lie.** Alcohol companies spend *billions* of dollars each year trying to get young people to drink. Many ads show people in their early 20s having fun with their friends, all designed to get you to buy their product.
- **Lots of young people *don't* drink or get high.** (Surprised? It may seem like "everyone is doing it," but actually, lots of young people are deciding that they are not interested.)
- **Decide if you want to deal with the consequences.**
 - Can you afford to risk getting caught? It could mean consequences from parents, school, and even the police.
 - Driving with alcohol (or drugs) in your bloodstream is dangerous, and it's a crime. Your license can be taken away, and you can face big fines (thousands of dollars).
 - How would you feel if abusing drugs or alcohol caused you to hurt yourself or someone you care about? (Alcohol-related accidents are a major cause of injury for people your age.)
 - Do you really want to lose control? Your self respect?

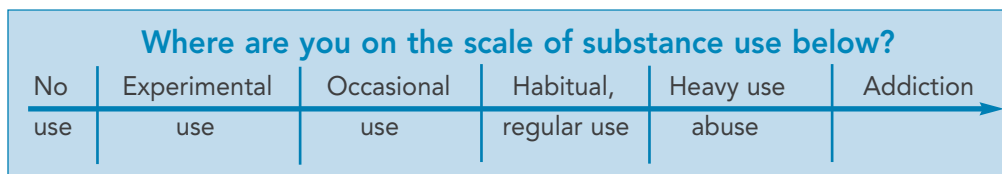
Staying safe

- **Don't get talked into anything dumb or dangerous.** That means stuff you wouldn't do while you were sober. Things that might seem funny when you're drunk or high can end up with people getting hurt.

- **Don't drive with anyone who is buzzed, drunk, or high.** It can be deadly. Did you know that the number one cause of death for teens and young adults is car crashes? Call someone you trust or a taxi for a safe ride home. If you're stuck, some communities offer safe rides at no cost. (Look under "safe ride" in the yellow pages or call information.)
- **Protect yourself from drinks that may be spiked.** "Date rape" drugs can be slipped into a drink without you knowing it. Don't accept open drinks or let anyone else make you a drink, and be alert for any signs of trouble.
- **You need a clear head to make healthy decisions about dating and sex.** Hooking up with someone while you're drunk or high increases your risks for date rape, an unwanted pregnancy, STDs, and the chance that later you'll regret getting together.

"But I'm just experimenting!"

Some people start out by occasionally drinking or getting high as a way to have fun or to escape from feelings they don't like. But even occasional use can lead to health problems, long-term abuse, and addiction – even when you're still young. Nobody ever starts out thinking they'll end up abusing or unable to stop. Did you know the earlier someone starts using, the more likely they will end up with addiction?



Where do you want to be?

Keep in mind that there can be risks and problems at any point. (Someone who is just experimenting can still end up hurt or in trouble.) Addiction is just one of many potential problems. It's easier to stop using before problems start.

Do you (or someone close to you) need help?

You may know someone who is having problems at school, at work, or in relationships because they drink or get high.

Ask yourself, or your friend, these questions:

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| • Have you ever ridden in a car driven by someone (including yourself) that was high or had been using alcohol or drugs? | Yes | No |
| • Do you ever use alcohol or drugs to relax, feel better about yourself, or fit in? | Yes | No |
| • Do you ever use alcohol or drugs while you are by yourself? | Yes | No |
| • Do you ever forget things you did while using alcohol or drugs? | Yes | No |
| • Do family or friends ever tell you that you should cut down on your drinking or drug use? | Yes | No |
| • Have you every gotten into trouble while you were using alcohol or drugs? | Yes | No |

If you answered yes to 2 or more questions, you may have a problem and need help. Most people who are having problems can't quit on their own, even though they try.

Kaiser Permanente is here to help.

You can always call Kaiser Permanente without anyone knowing and make an appointment with your doctor or a counselor who specializes in substance abuse in young people. If you are using alcohol or drugs to try to cope with stress or feelings, we can help you learn healthier ways. Please don't wait until problems get worse. We are here to help.

More resources

Web sites

- kp.org
- kidshealth.org/teen/drug_alcohol (KidsHealth College Page)
- abovetheinfluence.com

Phone numbers

- KP Chemical Dependency Services: 1-800-464-4000
- National STD Hotline: 1-800-227-8922
- Alcohol Drug Helpline: 1-800-729-6686

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.