

# Your Brain On Drugs

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## What does drug use do to your memory?

A few years back there was a TV commercial showing a frying pan and an egg. First they held up the egg and said, "This is your brain." Then they cracked the egg into the hot frying pan and said, "This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?" Turns out it was a pretty fair analogy. Here's what happens to your brain and memory on these drugs:

**Ecstasy** - This is an amphetamine. Extended use of this drug can cause difficulties in telling the difference between reality and fantasy, and problems concentrating. It's hard to write a test if you can't concentrate on it. Studies have found that this drug destroys fibers in the brain tissue. These fibers may grow back, but they don't grow back normally. Like most drugs, this one affects your memory and can cause paranoia, anxiety, and confusion.

**Heroin** - Heroin is a highly addictive opiate. Brain cells can very quickly come to rely on this drug to the extent that they need it in order to function. While heroin use starts with a rush of pleasure, it leaves the user in a fog for many hours afterwards. The greatest danger with heroin is the addiction. Users soon find that their sole purpose in life is to have more of the drug that their body has become dependant on, and everything else becomes secondary to that need.

**Marijuana (Pot)** - The parts of the brain which control emotions, memory, and judgment are affected by pot. Smoking pot can not only weaken your short-term memory (making it harder to remember what you learned in biology class today), but can prevent that information from making it into your long term memory. So, when you write your exam at the end of the year, you won't remember what you learned. It can also weaken your problem solving skills.

**Alcohol** - Don't fool yourself into thinking that booze is safer than drugs (It's not). Alcohol use impairs your judgment and leads to memory lapses. It can even lead to blackouts. It distorts vision, lessens your coordination, and can damage every organ in your body, including your brain.

**Cocaine** - Cocaine, both in powder form and as crack, is very addictive. Once a person is addicted to a drug, they lose interest in many other areas of their life, including school, sports, and friends. Use of this drug can cause feelings of paranoia and anxiety. Its physical effect on the receptors in the brain reduces their ability to feel pleasure (which in turn causes the dependency on the drug).

**Inhalants** - These are substances that are sniffed, including glue, gasoline, hair spray, paint thinner, and more. They are very dangerous because their effect on the brain is almost immediate. And while some vapors leave the body quickly, others will stay in there for a long time. The fatty tissues protecting the nerve cells in your brain are destroyed by inhalant vapors. This slows down or even stops transmissions from these nerve cells. Depending on which part of the brain these cells are in, you could lose the ability to learn new things or to solve multi-part problems.

**LSD (Acid)** - This is an unpredictable drug. It cause paranoia, confusion, anxiety, and panic attacks. Like Ecstasy, the user often blurs reality and fantasy, and has a distorted view of time and distance.

**Steroids** - Anabolic steroids are taken to improve athletic performance and gain muscles, but unfortunately, many users fail to make themselves aware of the health risks involved. Not only do they cause moodiness, they have been found to permanently impair learning and memory abilities in animals. They may be doing to same in humans.

**Tobacco** - You may not think of smoking cigarettes as being the same as doing drugs. In fact, you are inhaling a dangerous drug, nicotine, into your body. Nicotine affects the brain quickly, like other inhalants, producing feelings of pleasure, like cocaine, and is highly addictive, like heroin.

**Ritalin** - Yes, this is the same drug prescribed to ADD patients, but it is quickly becoming an illicit street drug as well. It is readily available, and inexpensive, but many people don't realize that it is illegal to possess the drug without a prescription. The main problem with its use lies in the fact that it was developed to be taken orally, as a pill. Drug users looking for a high will instead crush the pill into a powder and snort it like cocaine, or inject it like heroin. It then has a much more powerful effect on the body and other ingredients in the pill also have an effect. It causes severe headaches, anxiety, paranoia, and delusions.

Now you know the facts. There are no safe drugs, and all of them will adversely affect you in some way, both right now and over the long term. Isn't your future more important than that?