

TOBACCO, ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS IN BELGIUM



Effects, risks and legislation

de druglijn

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Effects, risks and legislation



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Voor 'tabak' en 'energie dranken' in samenwerking met VIGeZ

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gezondheidsproblemen of illegale praktijken ongegrond is.



INTRODUCTION

Everyone comes in contact with drugs. Maybe you have friends whose son occasionally smokes a joint. Maybe there is someone in your family with alcohol related issues. You know someone who wants to quit smoking. Maybe you swallow the odd painkiller. Or you once took sleeping pills. How do drugs affect people?



Drugs can work in three ways:

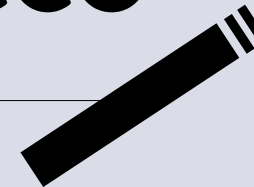
- ✘ **Stimulants** (speed, cocaine, khat, etc.) pep you up. People take these drugs to dance, play sport or work longer. They feel less tired. They increase the heart rate.
- ✘ **Narcotics** (alcohol, sleeping pills, painkillers, heroin, etc.) make you feel calm. They reduce anxiety and pain. The heart rate slows down.
- ✘ With **hallucinogens** (XTC, LSD, etc.) you see, feel and hear the world differently. You also estimate your feelings differently. For instance, you become happy or angry about things that don't even exist.

Certain drugs give a combination of these three effects. This is the case with XTC (hallucinogens and stimulants).

The effects vary enormously from one type of drug to another. Nonetheless, a few things apply to drugs. All drugs give you the urge to experience the effect more often. This results in you wanting to take the drug more often. With certain drugs, you need more and more in order to acquire the same experience again. Those who have the urge to take the drugs again are mentally addicted. This can happen with all drugs, as well as with similar behaviour, such as gambling or gaming. Certain drugs can also make you physically addicted. In such cases, you become ill if you don't use them regularly, or when you stop altogether.



Tobacco



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I smoke cigarettes. But that doesn't harm anyone around me, right?

Actually it does. Tobacco differs from most other drugs. Smoking is not only harmful to your own body, but also to the health of the people around you. They also inhale your smoke. The most vulnerable people are children and pregnant women.

Effect Tobacco contains a substance called nicotine, which initially makes you feel calm and relaxed after smoking. But after a while the effects of nicotine wear off and you start to feel restless and uncomfortable. And then what do you want? Another cigarette of course! This means that your body is addicted to nicotine. On top of that, you simply get used to the habit of smoking, which means that in certain circumstances you feel the urge to smoke. For example, you always light up a cigarette while waiting for the bus, or on a night out, or before going to bed, etc.

Risk Nicotine becomes addictive very quickly, therefore quitting smoking is not easy. Tobacco addiction is a serious habit. Smoking also comes with unpleasant smells and bad breath. It's bad for your physical fitness. If you smoke regularly, you are more likely to suffer from serious diseases, like lung cancer, bronchitis or heart problems.

Smoking during pregnancy is extremely harmful to your unborn child.



Legislation In Belgium, it is illegal to sell tobacco to people under 16. It is also forbidden to smoke in public areas, including trains, buses, aeroplanes, restaurants, bars, schools and at the workplace.



Alcohol

* **My husband occasionally drinks beer. A glass of beer contains less alcohol than a glass of whisky, right?**

No, there is no difference, as long as you pour them into the proper glass. Beer in a beer glass, whisky in a whisky glass, or wine in a wine glass. The amount of alcohol is always the same. There are two exceptions: special beers containing higher percentages of alcohol and at home people tend to pour more into the glasses than the barman does in a bar.

Effect Alcohol dulls the brain. A few glasses of alcohol make you feel happy and relaxed. You are more self-confident. You are more talkative. When you drink more, you become less attentive. You react more slowly. You probably make bad decisions. When you drink even more, you experience difficulty with walking, watching and speaking. Your emotions can change quickly.

Elderly people and women have a lower tolerance to alcohol.

RISK If you drink a lot, this can result in a hangover the following day, which gives you a headache and possibly nausea. Sometimes you don't remember what happened the night before.

You take more risks when you are drunk. You easily become aggressive and less attentive. It's dangerous to drive your car or carry out work.

The combination of alcohol and other drugs is dangerous.

If you drink large quantities or on a regular basis, it will

affect your whole body. It's bad for your stomach, brain and heart. You are more likely to get cancer. You can become both physically and mentally addicted.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy is harmful to your unborn child. When you are breastfeeding, it is advisable not to drink alcohol at all.



Legislation It is illegal to serve, sell or offer alcohol to those under 16. Beer and wine are legal from the age of 16. Strong drinks such as whisky, rum, vodka, etc., are only legal from the age of 18.

Medication



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I told my girlfriend that I'm stressed out. She gave me a pill that had helped her against stress. Will I feel better if I take it?

You and your girlfriend may have the same complaints, but the cause may not be the same. If that is the case, you should be treated differently. The doctor can diagnose the cause of your problem and give you the appropriate treatment. Always ask your doctor for medication.

Effect Some drugs work on your mind. Think of sleeping pills, sedatives, antidepressants and painkillers. They exist in the form of pills, powders, capsules, liquids or sprays. Some medications have a numbing effect, while others give you energy. They are used to treat health problems such as poor sleeping, anxiety, depression and pain. Sleeping remedies can help you sleep better. Sedatives reduce the feelings of anxiety, stress and worry. Painkillers relieve sudden or chronic pain.

Risk Medication often doesn't solve the causes of problems. It just reduces the symptoms. Therefore medication is not always the best solution. Discuss the other possible solutions with your doctor. Different eating habits or more physical activity may help. Maybe therapy would help.

If you use too many medicines or you take them too often, you run the risk of addiction. You begin to feel you can't do without and feel bad when you stop taking them.

Virtually every type of medication can have side effects.

Buying medicines on the internet or on the street is dangerous. You never know what they contain. Always buy them at the pharmacist or chemist.



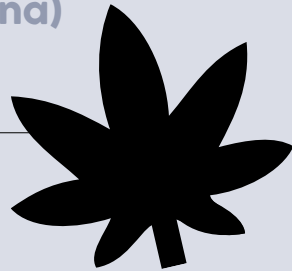
Legislation

You cannot buy sleeping remedies, sedatives, antidepressants and stronger painkillers without a prescription. You can only get them from the pharmacist or chemist once you hand over the prescription. All medicines come with a leaflet clearly explaining how they should be taken. Listen carefully to the advice given by your doctor or the pharmacist.



Cannabis

(hash/marijuana)



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Do my friend's joints really help combat stress?

The joints seem to calm him down for a while, but they don't eliminate the problems. Cannabis reinforces the current mood you are in. So if your friend is feeling down, he'll start feeling even worse.

Effect You feel relaxed and calm. You perceive things differently. Colours become more vivid, music seems nicer. Cannabis exaggerates the mood you are in, even if you are feeling unwell.

When you smoke a joint you feel more like eating and your heart beats faster. Your arms and legs feel heavy. Your eyes turn red. The effects last from two, up to four hours. Some people put cannabis in food or drinks. In this case, the effects last twice as long, but they also become more unpredictable, because you don't know exactly how much you have in your body.

Risk Sometimes you forget things you have just done. Cannabis and studying don't go well together. Smoking cannabis reduces your levels of attention. It is dangerous if you have to work or drive a vehicle or a car.

In Belgium, cannabis is often smoked as a joint, which also contains tobacco. With joints, you also inhale more tar than when smoking a cigarette, which is harmful to your lungs. You can become addicted to tobacco by smoking joints.

Sometimes the effects are different from what you expected. You feel sick or anxious. If you use cannabis regularly, you can become irritable and sleep badly.

This is not a quick remedy for forgetting your problems. You may think you are feeling better, but after a while, you realise that not much has changed. You become muzzy and in the meantime, your problems appear to have worsened.



Legislation Cannabis is illegal. You can be prosecuted for the use, possession or sale of it. For +18 year olds who have a small amount of cannabis in their possession for personal use, the police are sometimes more lenient. This is why some people think that cannabis is legal in Belgium. But this is not true.



Speed & cocaine

✖

Do speed and cocaine help you party longer without side effects?

Speed and cocaine are stimulants. Normally they are powders that can be inhaled (snorted). But speed and cocaine can also be smoked. Initially they boost your energy, but once the effect has worn off, you'll be exhausted and you don't feel like partying anymore.



Effects Stimulants give you a lot of energy. You feel less tired and want to keep on going. Stimulants increase your heart rate. You are less hungry and not tired. You feel very happy. It feels as if you can do a lot of things at once. You feel self-confident and talk a lot.

Risks When using these drugs you can suffer from headaches, abdominal pains, increased body temperature, heart palpitations, hyperventilation and muscle cramps. The extra energy does not come from the drug itself, but from your body. This is why after using them you feel extremely tired and no longer feel like doing anything. Speed and cocaine are produced in illegal laboratories. You never know exactly what illegal drugs contain, so that the risks are even higher.



Legislation

Speed and cocaine are illegal. You can be prosecuted for the use, possession or sale of these drugs.

The effect of stimulants is often very strong. You can easily become addicted.

The desire to use the drugs again increases enormously. After a while, it can be very difficult to do without them. Even if you manage to quit, it's difficult not to start using again.

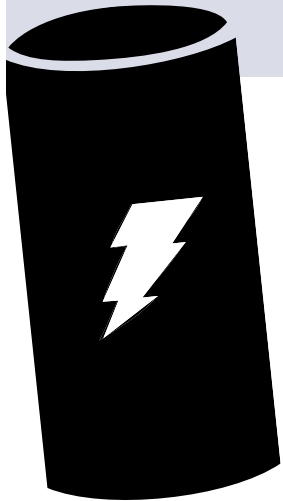


Energy drinks

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Can I give my children energy drinks?

Energy drinks contain sugar and caffeine (coffee also contains caffeine). One energy drink can contain as much caffeine as one or two cups of strong coffee. Do you allow your children to drink coffee? Furthermore, energy drinks contain as much sugar as Coca-Cola.



Effect After consuming an energy drink, you feel less tired. But energy drinks don't really take the tiredness away. They actually produce a false sense of well-being.

Risk When you consume energy drinks, your heart beats faster, you have difficulty falling asleep and you easily become angry or irritable. This is the same as when you drink too much coffee.

These drinks often contain a large amount of sugar, so you can also gain weight and they're bad for your teeth. Energy drinks are not sports drinks. You should always drink water when playing sport. Mixing energy drinks and alcohol is dangerous. You easily underestimate the amount of alcohol you're actually drinking, therefore you don't immediately realise that you're becoming drunk. You feel over-confident, which may in turn lead to dangerous situations.



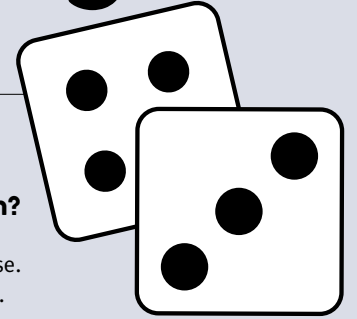
Legislation

Selling and drinking energy drinks is legal in Belgium.





Gambling



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If I gamble, how likely is it that I'll win?

Gambling is playing with money. You can win or lose. Whether you win or you lose is purely coincidental. You can't control it. You are definitely more likely to lose than to win.

Effect The fact that you can either win or lose (a lot of) money adds to the thrill of gambling. You feel very excited. The more money you bet, the more thrilling it becomes, and gambling can give you a rush in those situations.

Risk You can become mentally addicted to gambling and the thrill you get from it. You lose control over your gambling, resulting in money-related problems. This can lead to problems related to

relationships, career and health. Gamblers often think that they can repay their gambling debts by gambling 'just once more'. This virtually always results in the problems increasing, because they end up losing even more money.



Legislation

Gambling is legal in Belgium, but there are strict rules. Gambling is permitted at a restricted number of locations, which require to have a gambling license. Casinos, slot machine halls and betting shops are only accessible to +21 years olds. Betting companies and bars with slot machines are accessible to +18 years olds. People over 18 can also participate in the lottery.

People can protect themselves against gambling by banning access to casinos, slot machine halls and online gambling.

IF DRUG USE BECOMES A PROBLEM

✘ **Everyone I know drinks alcohol. I also know people who smoke cannabis. I don't think there's a problem - is there?**

Most people have used drugs. Think of people drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes or swallowing painkillers. Most people do it to get something positive out of it. For example, they do it just for fun with friends. Most of the time, this doesn't pose a problem, neither to themselves nor to others.

Yet, this is not the case for everyone. Some people can't have an occasional glass of beer or a cigarette just for the fun of it.

- ✘ Some people consume too much or too often. They become a danger to both themselves and to others. Think of road accidents, fights, etc.
- ✘ Some people develop addiction, which may cause severe health problems. It can also lead to problems related to your financial situation, relationships, work, school, etc.



In both cases, we speak of problematic consumption. If you recognise yourself or someone close to you in this, then you should seek help.



QUESTIONS ABOUT TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, MEDICATIONS OR DRUGS



- ✘ *"My son talks about cannabis with his friends. I am worried. I know very little about drugs. Fortunately my questions were answered over the phone: quickly and simply."*
(worried father who called De DrugLijn)
- ✘ *"I don't always want to bother my female friends by talking about my son's addiction. But now I can finally tell my story. My doctor is helping me out to find a way of convincing my son to change his lifestyle. What a relief!"*
(mother of a young drug user)
- ✘ *"I've been drinking alcohol for years. I always did it to feel better. In the end I wasn't able to control it. I was drinking more and more. Thanks to the support of a psychologist, I'm starting to find my way towards a better lifestyle."*
(single woman)

The initial and most important step: talk about tobacco, alcohol, medicines and drugs with your friends, family or doctor. Everyone needs advice or someone to listen from time to time. Don't wait too long before looking for help.

You can also ask for professional help.

Call or email your questions about **drugs, alcohol, medicines or gambling**.

You can do it anonymously: you don't have to give your name.

De DrugLijn
078/15.10.20
www.druglijn.be

→ *Dutch and English*

Infor-Drogues
02/227.52.52
www.infor-drogues.be

→ *French*

Call or email your questions about **tobacco**.

You can it anonymously: you don't have to give your name.

Tabakstop
0800/111.00
<http://www.tabakstop.be/>

→ *Dutch, French, English*

Do you have any questions about **your own drug use** or that of **somebody close to you**?

You can make an appointment with a professional carer. Carers are bound by confidentiality: what you tell them stops there. You can go to a Centrum Geestelijke Gezondheidszorg (CGG) in your neighbourhood.

Sometimes hospitalisation is necessary for recovering from an addiction. There are specialised hospitals and organisations where you can stay for as long as is needed. You can normally get professional help following hospitalisation.

