

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Recreational Drug Use: What's the Harm?

Recreational drug use can be defined as the use of drugs strictly for pleasure, and quite often in social situations. Recreational users are not necessarily physically or psychologically dependent on drugs, however these users do run the risk of developing a dependency.

There is considerable controversy surrounding the use of drugs, and opinions vary widely from those who think all drugs should be illegal, to those who advocate for the legalization of certain drugs.

Even though it is illegal to use drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, LSD, ecstasy, and amphetamines, those who choose to use these substances can find them quite readily. And many—both young and old—believe there is little or no harm to using these drugs recreationally.

Why Use?

Recreational drug users find that using drugs, from marijuana to cocaine, can help them: improve their mood, increase excitement and enjoyment, reduce inhibitions, become more relaxed, and achieve social acceptance among their peers. These benefits are generally reported to be immediate and short-term. The negative consequences of recreational drug use, on the other hand, tend to be delayed and longer term.

Escalation

Any recreational drug user risks escalation of their drug use, which in turn may develop into a drug dependency. Drug use and the problems associated with it may start off as limited or small, but gradually escalate to causing bigger problems in more areas of the user's life. Some drugs, like cocaine and its derivatives, are more addictive than others, like marijuana.

A Habit is Hard to Break

Whether drug use is daily, just on the weekend, or only in certain situations (i.e., getting together with certain friends), once formed, a habit can be very hard to break. When an individual uses drugs because of habit, it means some level of dependency has developed and the drug behavior can easily become problematic.

Binge Use

Recreational drug users may binge. Binges or excessive drug use over a specified period of time can contribute to health problems both short-term and long-term. Binge behavior tends to adversely affect work or school performance and can negatively impact family and social relationships.

A Drug Habit Can Cause Long-Term Issues

Once recreational drug use has transformed into a regular habit and dependency has been established, the negative long-term effects of using drugs start to become noticeable.

For example, the once recreational and now daily cannabis user will soon find out that over the long-term, cannabis acts as a depressant. Some long-term cannabis users complain of low energy and motivation levels. They might find themselves "stuck" in a dead end job or an unfulfilling marriage, but

do not have enough motivation or energy to change their life.
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As well as being costly, a four- or five-time-a-week cocaine habit often results in significant health deterioration. Feelings of paranoia are a notable and frequent side effect of longer-term cocaine use.

Recreational drug use will continue to exist, and opinions about its effects remain controversial. Those who use drugs occasionally are cautioned to be vigilant about any changes in their attitudes, behavior and lifestyle that occur. Those that may feel what was once an occasional indulgence in a social setting is now developing into a habit should seriously consider curbing their use. At this point, continuing to rationalize one's drug use as "recreational" may cross the border into the denial that is typical of the first stage of addiction.

If you feel you may be crossing a line, try to quit. See what happens. If you find it very difficult, and would like support in curbing your drug use, talk to your doctor or a professional.