

Drug Impairment



Divided attention or psychophysical ability is reduced with substance use. Remember all drugs will have some impairing affect. Some maybe slight and hardly noticeable other effects may render that person incapable of performing their task or duty.

In other words “**is that person fit for work and are they involved in a safety critical role?**”

- **Cannabis**

Common UK illicit drug has an initial short stimulant effect and then sedative and relaxed phase. The psychoactive ingredient is THC (Tetra Hydro Cannabinol) which has been genetically modified in recent years to have a far stronger effect on the user, which can lead to depression, psychosis, chest infections and, in some adolescents, schizophrenia.

Key safety issues: Time and distance perception impaired, lack of motivation and judgement, apathy, inability to problem solve, poor concentration, mood swings, anxiety, increased heart rate and lack of coordination.

- **Opiates (Reduce pain and anxiety!)**

This group covers everything from “over the counter” cough medicine to heroin and morphine. Codeine is commonly found in everyday medication but if used outside clinical advice or guidelines can be highly addictive like all opiates!

It can also test positive in workplace testing programmes. Codeine is also an illicit (banned) substance in many countries, so check all medications before you travel!

Key safety issues: Pulse and blood pressure are down and the person becomes sleepy with slow reflexes. Pain and anxiety are reduced. Due to the addictive nature of opiates withdrawal becomes an issue if the subject uses them illegally or outside of medical advice. This group of drugs will result in a lack of concentration affecting their vision, judgement and decision making. Constricted (small) pupils will be observed.

- **Hallucinogens**

This group which as it suggests have hallucinogenic properties. Typical hallucinogens are LSD, Ecstasy (MDMA) and ‘magic mushrooms’. Users can experience events that do not exist outside of the mind, for example believing they can fly or some other event which isn’t actually happening or a greatly exaggerated view of an innocuous event. Colours senses and emotions are heightened and sometimes transposed or swapped around.

Key safety issues: Poor balance, dazed appearance, paranoia sensory distortions or “bad trips”

- **CNS Stimulants (Accelerator pedal on the body!)**

This group stimulates the central nervous system (CNS) heart rate is up and blood pressure. Typically they include Cocaine, Amphetamine, Methamphetamine, Methadone and some “New Psychoactive Substances” (NPS) which used to be incorrectly referred to as “legal highs”.

Key safety issues: Risk to health with high pulse and BP having an adverse effect on the heart and CNS system, leading to a 'down side,' exhaustion or depression after use. Ingestion leads to increased risk taking and a feeling of invincibility and over confidence. Eyes become dilated (large) and again vision will become sensitive & painful to moderate or bright light. The user is restless and can become easily irritated and occasionally volatile.

Drug categories

Their effects

- **CNS Depressants (brake pedal on the body!)**

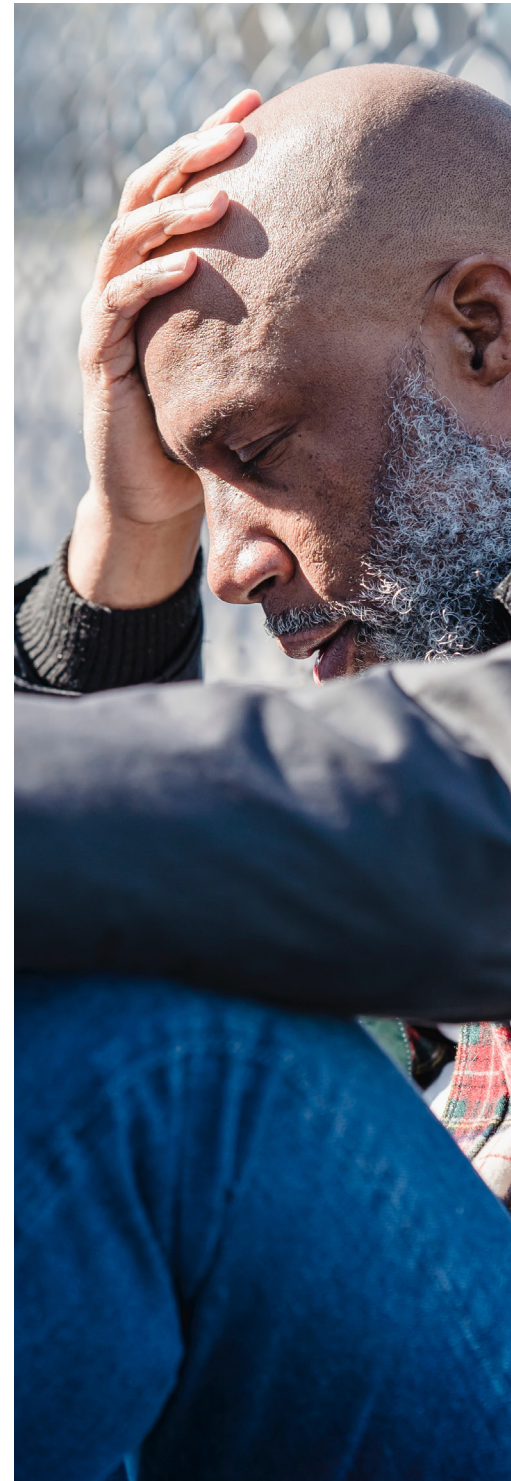
This group covers Benzodiazepines, anti-depressants, alcohol, GHB and many others. If a person looks intoxicated, acts drunk and appears drunk yet they haven't consumed alcohol then there is a good chance they are intoxicated with depressant medicine. Many over the counter medicines which can make a person appear drowsy are CNS depressants as they lower the pulse and BP.

Key safety issues: A person may become uncoordinated, slow and impaired in their reactions, confused and unable to problem solve and can lead to poor self-control and decision making. Alcohol is a CNS depressant and most people are familiar with the signs and symptoms of someone in their presence who is intoxicated with alcohol.

- **Dissociate Anaesthetics**

PCP is a massive problem in the US and in other parts of the world. The user has a blank stare, sweating, hallucinations and often violent. There is another similar drug to PCP called Ketamine which has become widely available and popular with users throughout the western world and Asia.

Key safety issues: The user believes they are disassociated from the body and as it's an anaesthetic so they also feel little or no pain. There is a high risk the user will injure themselves and self-mutilation is not uncommon. Ketamine has a corrosive effect on the urinary tract and in time can cause the user to suffer from cystitis or at worst removal of their bladder. Ketamine is often known as the "horse tranquilliser" it is used for this and other surgical procedures. It remains a powerful anaesthetic often found or adulterated into other illicit substances from other drug groups!



- **Inhalants**

Volatile solvents, glues, paints and aerosols. Used mainly by adolescents inhaled deeply into the lungs for intoxication. Very common in the 1980's with glue sniffing youths but still exists today with products containing toluene. Recently nitrous oxide (laughing gas) has become popular at events and parties, it is perceived as harmless but it's far from that.

It creates a lack of B12 and oxygen in the brain and has been implicated in a number of deaths in the UK.

Key safety issues: Evident extreme intoxication and vital organ and lung damage. Poly Drug use
The mixing of drugs from the different categories; i.e. Alcohol and prescription medicine, Alcohol and cocaine, Heroin and cocaine (speedballing) etc.

*These brief notes have been compiled to accompany Screen4's Drug and Alcohol Testing and Support Solutions. For further information about this and other drug and alcohol courses, please visit www.screen4.org