Psychoactive Drugs

**Depressants**

*Alcohol*

- Most widely used and abused depressant
- Intoxicant – produces a state of drunkenness; the more a person drinks, the stronger the intoxicating effects
- In addition to physical effects, has effect of lowering inhibitions, which may lead to impulsive, aggressive behavior.
- Clouds judgment, impairs concentration and attention, as well as the ability to weigh consequences of behavior
- Alcohol accounts for more premature deaths in the U.S. than any other psychoactive substances except tobacco
- 1 in 10 Americans suffers from alcoholism – people become physiologically dependent on alcohol and are unable to control their use
- Binge drinking on the rise in colleges – danger because of engaging in risky behavior, but also because placed at risk for death from alcohol poisoning
- DO NOT leave a person to “sleep it off” if they exhibit these signs:
  - Failure to respond when talked to or shouted at
  - Failure to respond to being pinched, shaken, or poked
  - Inability to stand unaided
  - Failure to wake up
  - Purplish or clammy skin
  - Rapid pulse rate, irregular heart rhythm, low blood pressure, or difficulty breathing
  - *Call 911 and obtain medical advice!*

**Barbiturates and Tranquilizers**

- Barbiturates – calming, sedating drugs that have legitimate medical uses (most often treating pain) (Quaaludes, Sopor, “Roofies”).
  - Induce drowsiness, slurred speech, impair motor skills, judgment.
  - Overdoses can be lethal, especially when mixed with alcohol.
  - Highly addictive.
- Tranquilizers – depressants widely used to treat anxiety and insomnia
  - Valium, Xanax
  - Also addictive, so should be used only for short periods of time.

**Opioids (narcotics)** – have legitimate medical uses as painkillers, deadening postsurgical pain and for some other pain conditions.

- Rush of pleasurable excitement and dampens awareness of personal problems (why they are popular as illicit drugs)
- Morphine, heroin, Codeine – naturally-occurring drugs from poppy plant
- Demerol, Percodan, Darvon – synthetic opioids, having similar effect
- Heroin – most widely abused opioids; tolerance develops. *Habitual user’s life revolves around his/her next “fix”*
**Stimulants**

**Amphetamines**
- Not found in nature; chemically manufactures in labs.
- Activates sympathetic nervous system – causing physiological systems to be aroused
  - Low doses – boost alertness, concentration, lessen fatigue
  - High doses – intense rush. Boosts levels of norepinephrine, dopamine
- Benzedrine, Methamphetamine, Dexedrine – can be used in pill form, smoked, or injected.
- Overdoses common because users develop tolerance, having dangerous, even fatal, consequences
- Abuse can also cause brain damage and amphetamine psychosis

**Cocaine**
- Natural stimulant derived from leaves of coca plant.
- Can be sniffed, smoked, injected, or ingested.
- Also increases brain levels of norepinephrine, dopamine.
- Directly stimulates reward pathways in brain, inducing feelings of extreme pleasure or euphoria.
- High is very short-lived (5-10 minutes) leaving user craving more.
- Danger to heart, circulatory system and other organs
- High doses have life-threatening, fatal consequences
- Other dangers – psychological problems, cocaine psychosis
- Highly addictive, users develop tolerance, experience withdrawal

**MDMA (Ecstasy)**
- Euphoric, hallucinogenic effects
- Undesirable effects: depression, anxiety, insomnia, paranoia and psychosis
- May also interfere with learning ability and attention and may have long-lasting effects on memory functioning
- Increases heart rate and blood pressure

**Nicotine**
- Mild stimulant that is highly addictive
- Naturally found in tobacco
- Speeds up heart rate, dampens appetite, promotes mild rush, but also induces feelings of relaxation, mental calmness
- Causes release of endorphins in the brain, producing states of pleasure, reducing pain
- Leading cause of premature death in U.S. and world
- Major cause of cancer, heart disease, emphysema
- Less prevalent among women, highly educated, older people

**Caffeine**
- Mild stimulant found in coffee, tea, cola, chocolate
- Our most widely used psychoactive drug
- Regular use leads to physiological dependence
- Drinking a cap or two of coffee or tea or even a few sodas a day is enough to become dependent
- Most caffeine users can maintain control over their use (no tolerance)
- Not known to be associated with health risks when used in moderation
**Hallucinogens**

**LSD**
- Produces vivid hallucinations and other sensory distortions
- Experience of using the drug (trip) may last up to 12 hours
- Pupils dilate, heart rate, blood pressure, body temp increase
- May also produce sweating, tremors, loss of appetite, sleeplessness
- Psychological effects variable, unpredictable – depend on the user’s personality, expectations about the drug, context in which it is used
- Some users experience “bad trips” – intense anxiety or panic, psychotic reactions, delusions
- Flashbacks may occur without warning in the weeks, months, years, following the use of LSD

**Mescaline, Psilocybin, PCP**
- Mescaline – derived from cactus plant
- Psilocybin – from certain mushrooms
- PCP – synthetic
  - Can produce distortions in time/space, feelings of unreality, and vivid, frightening hallucinations.
  - May lead to feelings of paranoia, blind rage and prompt bizarre or violent behavior.
  - High doses can lead to coma, death.
- All produce delirium – state of mental confusion, characterized by excitement, disorientation, difficulty focusing attention

**Marijuana**
- Derived from cannabis plant
- Most widely used illicit drug in U.S. and Western World
- Alters perception and can produce hallucinations, especially in high doses or when used by susceptible individuals
- In lower doses, mild euphoria, state of relaxation
- In high doses, can cause feelings of disorientation, panic attacks, paranoia
- Can create strong psychological dependence
- Physical risks – increases heart rate, blood pressure; impairs motor performance and coordination, making marijuana and driving an extremely dangerous combination
- Long-term use may lead to problems in learning, memory
- Increases risk of cancer