

1.6 Drugs

Learning objectives

After this topic you will be able to:

- describe the difference between recreational and medicinal drugs
- describe the effects of drugs on health and behaviour.



▲ Antibiotic pills are used to treat bacterial infections.

Some drugs can seriously damage your health, or even be deadly. Some can save your life, and are used widely in medicine. So what's the difference?

What are drugs?

Drugs are chemical substances that affect the way your body works. They alter the chemical reactions that take place inside your body. Sometimes these changes are helpful but in many cases they are harmful.

There are two types of drugs – **medicinal drugs** and **recreational drugs**.

A State what is meant by a drug.

What are medicinal drugs?

Medicinal drugs are used in medicine. They benefit your health in some way. They may be used to treat the symptoms of a condition; for example, paracetamol is taken to relieve pain. Other drugs can cure an illness. For example, antibiotics are often used to treat chest infections.

However, even medicinal drugs can cause harm if you do not take them in the right way. Some medicinal drugs also have unwanted side effects. When prescribing drugs, doctors have to weigh up the benefits of a person taking a drug over any possible risks.

B State what is meant by a medicinal drug.

What are recreational drugs?

Recreational drugs are drugs that people take for enjoyment, to help them relax, or to help them to stay awake. Recreational drugs normally have no health benefits and in many cases are harmful.

C State what is meant by a recreational drug.

Recreational drugs are not prescribed by a doctor. Many are illegal – this means that you are breaking the law if you take them. Even very small amounts of these drugs can damage your body. Examples of these drugs include heroin, cocaine, cannabis, and ecstasy.

Key Words

drug, medicinal drug, recreational drug, addiction, withdrawal symptoms



▲ Many recreational drugs are illegal.

D Name three illegal drugs.

Some recreational drugs are legal to use. They can still be harmful. These include:

- alcohol – drinking alcohol affects your nervous system and damages your liver.
- tobacco – smoking significantly increases your risk of cancer, as well as lung and heart disease.

Drug addiction

If your body gets used to the changes caused by a drug, it may become dependent on the drug. This means that you need to keep taking the drug to feel normal. If this happens you have an **addiction**. If a person with an addiction tries to stop taking the drug, they may suffer **withdrawal symptoms**. These can be very unpleasant and make it even harder to give up the drug. Withdrawal symptoms include headaches, anxiety, and sweating.

E State what is meant by an addiction.

Drug factsheet

Produce a factsheet about one of the following drugs to share with other members of your class: cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy, heroin



▲ Caffeine is a recreational drug that speeds up your nervous system.

Summary Questions

- 1 Copy and complete the sentences below.
Drugs are _____ that affect the way your body works.
_____ drugs are taken for enjoyment. _____ drugs benefit health.
If you take drugs too often you may develop an _____. When addicted people stop taking drugs, they suffer _____, which can make it harder to give up. (5 marks)
- 2 Describe three differences between medicinal drugs and recreational drugs. (3 marks)
- 3 Compare the effects of different types of drug on health and behaviour. (6 marks)