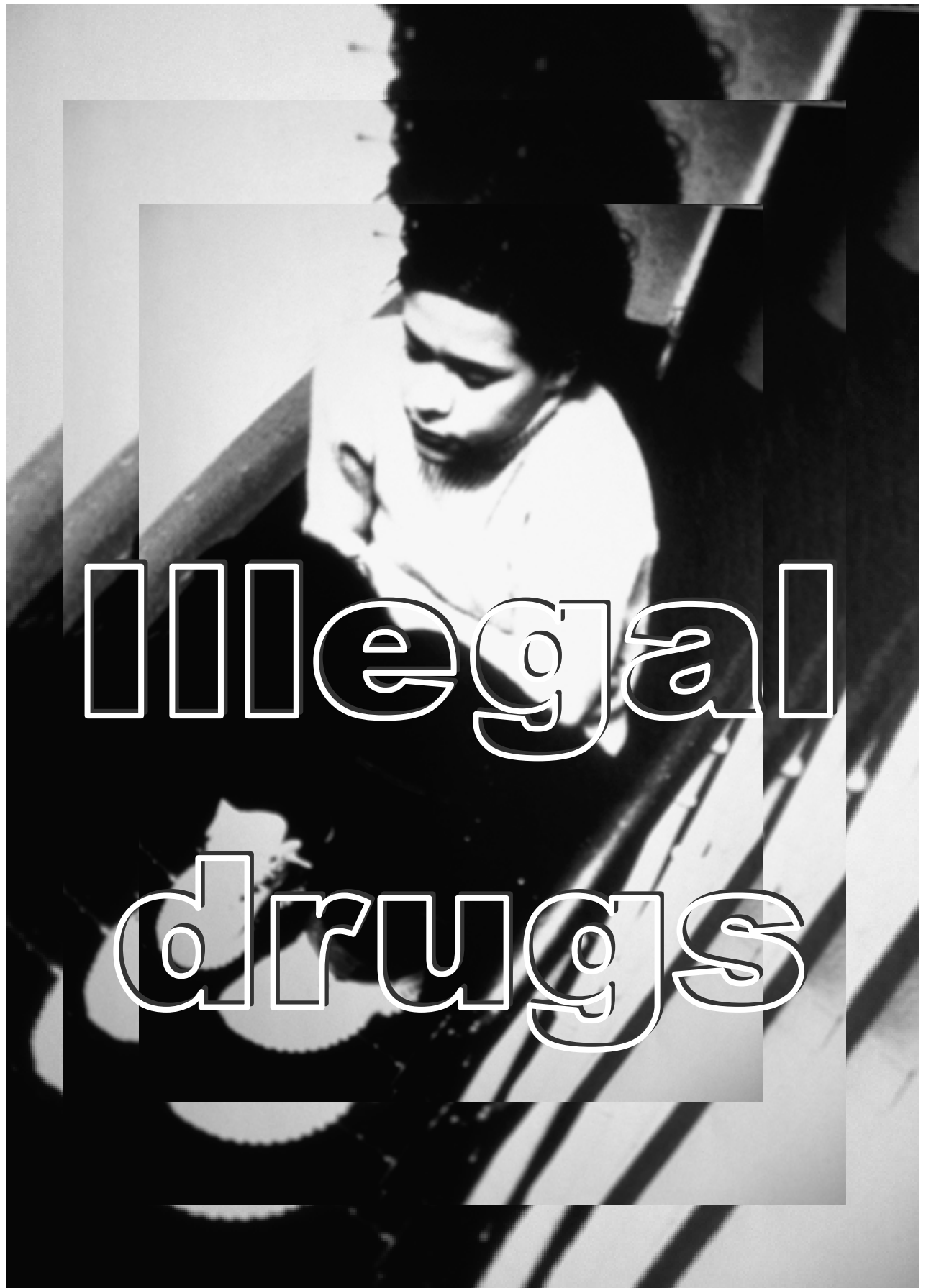




Illegal drugs

What happens when you take an illegal drug?

People take drugs for many reasons – because their friends do, for fun, to escape their problems, or simply out of curiosity. But most people have no idea what these drugs do to their bodies or minds. Drugs act in different ways.

Exactly how a drug affects you depends on many things – like your size, whether you have taken anything else, such as alcohol, and how used you are to that particular drug. It also depends on how you take it. Injecting or snorting a drug tends to have a faster and more powerful effect than swallowing one.

Knowing what you are getting

Another problem with illegal drugs is that you can never be sure exactly what is in them. Many cases of overdose or harm occur because a drug is too pure, or is contaminated with other substances.



From left to right, picture are nine illegal drugs: heroin, ecstasy, cannabis (gras), magic mushroom, LSD, cannabis resin, cocaine, crack and speed.

It is impossible to tell whether the drug you are buying has been properly manufactured or not. A bad reaction can produce frightening symptoms in people.

Can you tell when someone has taken a drug?

There are normally few physical signs that someone has taken an illegal drug. Although they often cause the pupils of the eyes to dilate, usually the only sign will be a change in behaviour.



Illegal drugs



How can drugs make you feel?

Many people drink alcohol because they like the taste, but most people take illegal drugs to make them feel different. These feelings depend on the drug.

Bad reactions

However, most illegal drugs can make you feel very bad indeed. You never know how you will react to an illegal substance.

Unfortunately, if you do have a bad reaction, all you can do is wait for the effects to wear off.



Illegal drugs



This boy is using a syringe to inject himself with drugs. Because there are very few physical symptoms, parents may not find out that their child is using drugs until he or she has become addicted.

Illegal drugs



These vials contain white crack crystals. Crack comes from cocaine and is highly addictive and very strong. Crack users heat the crystals to produce a vapour which they then inhale.

How can drugs affect me in the longer term?

Even if most drugs don't lead to addiction, they can be habit forming. The temptation is to take them more and more frequently.

Coming down

Cocaine can cause heart problems, chest pain and even convulsions, and can permanently damage the lining of your nose. Ecstasy has been linked to liver and kidney problems. Long term use of amphetamines can put a strain on your heart. As with tobacco, smoking a lot of cannabis puts you at risk of throat and lung cancer.

Paying the price

One of the problems with illegal drugs is that they are not tested for safety in the same way as medical drugs. No one knows, therefore, what the long term effects of a drug may be, particularly for newer substances like ecstasy.



A razor blade is used to chop up speed (an amphetamine) into a fine powder which is then snorted.
Can drugs really kill me?

Illegal drugs

People used to think that all drugs were extremely dangerous and taking them inevitably lead to addiction and death. Although this put a lot of people off drugs, many others discovered that this simply wasn't true.

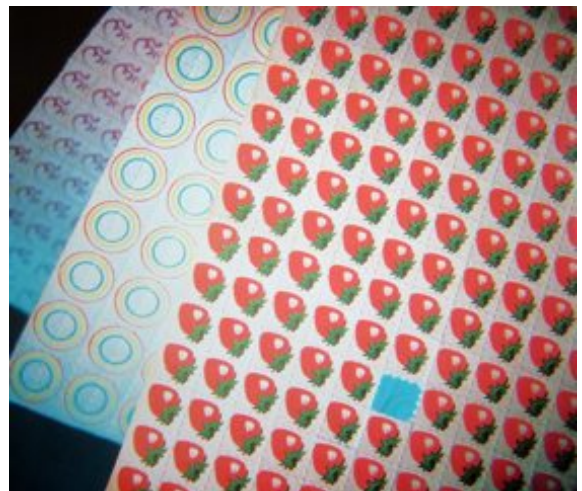


Although many people use drugs recreationally without serious side-effects, for some it can end in tragedy.

Risks

Taking a drug is always a gamble. You cannot tell what is in them or how you will react. Combining different drugs, especially on top of drinking alcohol, is particularly risky.

One of the most dangerous drug activities is abusing solvents like glue or aerosols. The risk of suffocation or choking on vomit is high, as is the change of sudden heart failure.



LSD is made in the form of tablets and as sheets of blotting paper that are cut into squares and impregnated with the drug. LSD, or 'acid', is illegal in most countries but is widely used as a recreational drug.