

when i'm at work: drugs and alcohol

a fact sheet for supported employees



This fact sheet is to help you understand the dangers of mixing drugs and alcohol with work. It will also tell you where you can find more help if you need it. You can read this fact sheet with a support worker at your service.

What are drugs?

Drugs are substances that make you feel different and/or make your body act differently to how it usually does. There are all sorts of drugs. Drugs are used by all sorts of people every day. Examples of these kinds of drugs include:

- ▶ coffee (coffee contains a drug called 'caffeine' which is not harmful in small amounts)
- ▶ cigarettes (cigarettes contain a drug called 'nicotine')
- ▶ headache tablets (these often contain a drug called 'paracetamol')
- ▶ tablets prescribed by your doctor
- ▶ alcohol (drinks like beer, wine, or spirits containing a drug called 'ethanol').

These drugs are legal drugs. This means that taking these drugs is not a crime.

There are other kinds of drugs that are illegal drugs. Taking these drugs, or giving them or selling them to other people is not allowed by law. People who take or sell these kinds of drugs can be charged and have to pay a fine or even go to gaol.

Types of illegal drugs

Cannabis

Cannabis is also called 'pot', 'dope', 'marijuana' and 'hashish'.

Cocaine

Cocaine is also called 'coke'.

Amphetamine

Amphetamine is also called 'speed' or 'go-ey'.

Did you know that more people in Australia die every year as a result of health problems caused by legal drugs like alcohol and tobacco than all people dying from using illegal drugs put together?

This means:

- ▶ everybody should be careful about any of the drugs they use, whether the drugs are legal or illegal
- ▶ if you think you have a problem with drugs or alcohol, there are places to get help.

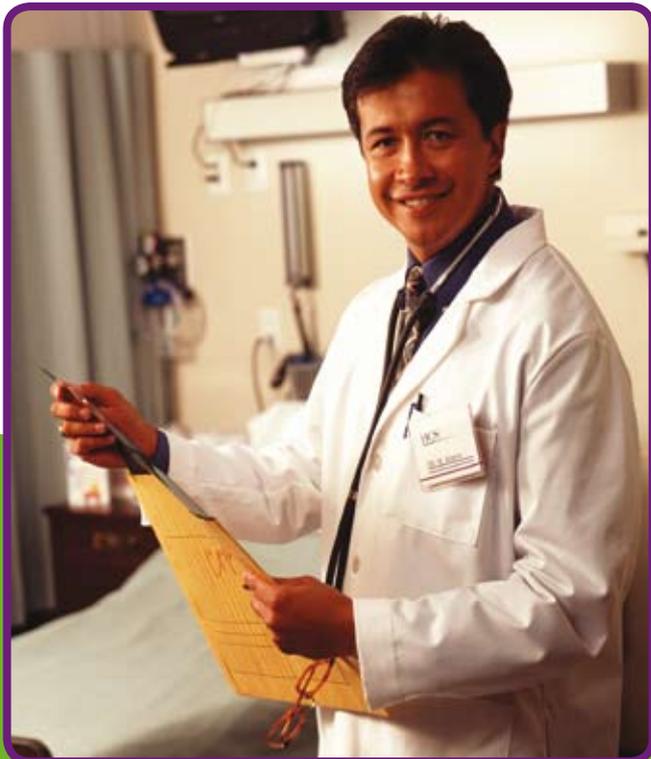


How do drugs work?

Drugs work depending on how they are taken, where they are taken, and how many are taken. All drugs can have side effects, even legal drugs. For example, drunk people have taken too much alcohol. The alcohol has affected their ability to make choices, to keep their voices down, to think before they speak, and to walk properly. The drunk person may also want to have a fight, or to argue with other people.

Some of the side effects of drugs are useful, and some of them are not so useful. For example, if you drink coffee every day, you might notice that when you drink a cup of coffee in the morning, the headache you had when you woke up has stopped. You might also notice that your heart is beating a bit faster, your hands are shaking a little, and you feel a little happier. These effects are all because of the drug in coffee called 'caffeine'.

Drugs and alcohol can affect different people in different ways. This means that there is no real way to say what levels of drugs or alcohol are safe, unless you are a doctor prescribing drugs as medication. This means that even using legal drugs, like alcohol, can cause people harm.



Drugs affect the mind and the body

The mind

Some drugs make people happy, some make them sad. Some drugs make people feel scared or very angry. Some people get violent, some people get very calm. Some drugs make it harder for people to make choices. Some drugs make people see things that are not there. Drugs affect the mind depending on how much of the drug has been taken, where it was taken, when it was taken and how it was taken.

The body

Drugs can have all sorts of effects on the body. For example, headache tablets help stop the production of some chemicals in the brain that have made the headache. Some drugs make people breathe more slowly or more quickly, or make their hearts beat faster or slower. Some drugs will mean people respond to some things quickly – others cause people to not react at all. Some drugs will stop a person from walking properly, or standing up, or staying awake. Some drugs will make a person unconscious, or even die.

How drugs affect the body depends on how much of the drug has been taken, where it was taken, when it was taken and how it was taken.

All drugs can be harmful and can affect the way the body works and how the mind thinks. For this reason, you have to be very sure that the drugs you are taking will not put you or anyone else in danger in the workplace.

It is important to remember:

- ▶ drugs affect your body and your mind
- ▶ all drugs have side effects
- ▶ there are 'legal' and 'illegal' drugs
- ▶ all drugs can be harmful.

Which drugs are OK to take at work?

Some drugs are OK to take at work in certain situations.

Examples

- ▶ Some drugs may have been given to you by your doctor to help you with things like headaches, epilepsy or asthma. These drugs are called medication. It is very important that you only use these medications in the way you have been told to. There will be some instructions written on the package. If you find them hard to read, you can get someone else to help you, to make sure you do not take more or less of the medication than you should.
- ▶ At morning tea, you might have a cup of coffee with your biscuits.

There are other things you should remember.

- ▶ Some workplaces ask their workers to hand in their medications so they can help you make sure you take the right amount at the right time. Check with your supervisor about what happens at your workplace.
- ▶ Some of the medicine prescribed by your doctor could make you sleepy, jumpy or act differently. If this happens, or you are worried, talk with your doctor or supervisor. If you are worried about medication you are taking, ask your doctor or supervisor to check that they will not cause problems.
- ▶ If your doctor has prescribed you new medicine, or changed the dosage of the medication you are currently taking, it can have an effect on you. You need to let your supervisor know if this has happened.

Smoking and work

You might remember that cigarettes are a type of drug too. Cigarettes not only contain a drug called nicotine, but thousands of chemicals that can cause harm to your health, and the health of other people.

If you are a smoker, you would know it is illegal to smoke in your workplace. If you are a smoker and you work, you can only smoke at certain times and in certain places. You should check what those times and places are at your workplace. Some workplaces do not let you smoke on their premises.

Tea breaks and lunch breaks are the usual times for people who smoke to have a cigarette.

Cigarette smoke hurts the person smoking the cigarette and it can hurt other people who are not smokers, and who may be standing nearby. This is because they can breathe in the smoke the smoker is blowing out. When someone who does not smoke breathes in someone else's smoke, it is called 'passive smoking'. This means people who do not smoke are at risk of getting sick from smoking too. That is why most workplaces do not allow smoking inside. It is also why there are special areas to smoke outside the workplace away from other people.

There are lots of ways you can give up smoking if you want to. If you want more information on how to give up smoking, you can call the Quitline on 131 848 or look at the website <http://www.quitnow.info.au/>



Drugs and alcohol and work.

Drugs and alcohol can affect your work

If you are given a drug you need by the doctor, and you are taking it as the doctor has instructed, it can help you do your job better. For example, if you get asthma, and you use your medication properly, it can mean you will not have an asthma attack so you do not have to take time off work. If you have epileptic fits from time to time, the tablets the doctor prescribes can stop this happening, making work safer for you and for others.

However, using alcohol or drugs you should not be using at work can cause you to make mistakes. This can cause big problems. You or other people could get hurt, or the work you do might have to be thrown out and done again by someone else. This would mean that your workplace loses money.

Here are some things that can happen at work if you use drugs that you should not use, or alcohol.

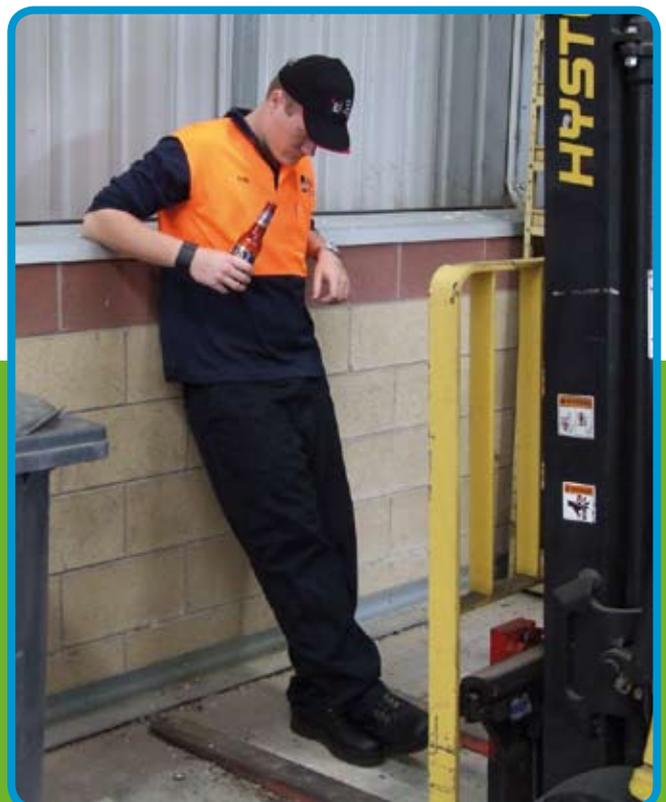
- ▶ You could hurt yourself.
- ▶ You could hurt someone else.
- ▶ You could make a mistake with your work.
- ▶ You could make your workplace lose a lot of money.

It can have a bad effect on you

A few of the things that could happen to you if you take drugs you should not be taking or drink alcohol at work are in this list.

- ▶ You can get very tired.
- ▶ You can stop thinking clearly.
- ▶ Your speech could get slurred.
- ▶ You can feel sick.
- ▶ You can vomit.
- ▶ You can stop thinking quickly.
- ▶ It could make you unsafe.
- ▶ You can start to feel very confused.
- ▶ You can act differently than you would normally.
- ▶ You can move more slowly than usual.
- ▶ You can get angry.
- ▶ You can have an accident.
- ▶ You won't be able to operate machinery and equipment safely.

Using drugs and alcohol wrongly at work can have bad effects on you and on your work.



It can have a bad effect on other people

If you take drugs you should not be taking or drink alcohol at work, you could have a bad effect on other people.

- ▶ You might make someone else have an accident.
- ▶ You might ruin some work so that someone else has to do it for you.
- ▶ You might ruin someone else's property.
- ▶ People might feel uncomfortable with you.
- ▶ You could scare other people.
- ▶ People will not want to work with you.



What can you do to stop drug and alcohol abuse at work?

It is always a risk to accept drugs from someone if you do not know what they are. The only safe way to take them is when a doctor has prescribed them for you and you are taking them exactly as you should. Even drugs prescribed by a doctor can be dangerous if they are not taken in exactly the way the doctor has said.

If you are offered drugs at work that are not prescribed for you by a doctor, or any type of alcohol like wine, beer or spirits, you need to tell your supervisor about it. Taking drugs that are not prescribed for you can be very dangerous.

If you have a problem with drug or alcohol abuse, you can talk with someone who you trust to get help. An advocate can put you in touch with the places you can go for help.

A good place to start is the alcohol and drug information service in your state or territory. There is a phone line that you can call and someone will talk to you and help you find a service that is right for you. Having problems with drugs and alcohol is a health matter and there are people who can help you make sure you are not hurting yourself or other people.

For more information

If you need to know more about drugs and alcohol and how they affect you or your work, you can call the alcohol and drug information service in your state or territory.

Alcohol and drug information services across Australia

NSW

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
(02) 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599 (toll free)

Victoria

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
(03) 9416 1818 or 1800 136 385 (toll free)

South Australia

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
1300 131 340

Western Australia

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
(08) 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (toll free)

Queensland

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
(07) 3236 2414 or 1800 177 833 (toll free)

Tasmania

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
(03) 6222 7511 or 1800 811 994 (toll free)

Northern Territory

Alcohol and Drug Information Services (ADIS)
1800 131 350 (toll free)

ACT

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
(02) 6205 4545

You can look on the internet

National

www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au
www.adin.com.au

Quitline

<http://www.alcohol.gov.au/>

New South Wales

www.druginfo.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory

www.nt.gov.au/health/healthdev/aodp/aodp.shtml

Queensland

www.health.qld.gov.au/atods

South Australia

www.dassa.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm

Tasmania

www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/services/view.php?id=354

Victoria

www.health.vic.gov.au/drugservices

Western Australia

www.dao.health.wa.gov.au