

The Effects of Drugs and Alcohol on Academic Life

Drug and alcohol use on college campuses is universal. Students articulate many reasons why they do it, but most neglect to consider both the long-term consequences of their actions. How wide-spread is drug and alcohol abuse? Teenagers today admit to extensive experimentation. According to one study, 90 percent of teens said that they have used alcohol, over 50 percent have used marijuana, 17 percent have used cocaine and 13 percent have used some form of hallucinogenic drug. Drug use has been classified as a major problem of students as early as in the fourth grade. Consequently, it is no surprise that substance use is prolific on college campuses, where many young adults are free from adult supervision for the first time in their lives.

Alcohol use accounts for over 100,000 deaths per year in this country. It contributes to over 50 percent of all suicides, violent crimes, emergency room admissions, traffic accidents, substandard job performances and industrial accidents, and 80 percent of all domestic violence incidents. You may falsely believe that you are “safe” because you live in the small community of Melbourne and that these issues don’t really affect you. To be more specific, how can drug and alcohol abuse affect a healthy young college student like you? The statistics are staggering:

- Drug and alcohol abuse is the leading cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 24
- 95% of all college campus violence is related to alcohol
- 28% of all college dropouts are alcoholics and 40% of all college students having academic problems abuse alcohol
- Over 60% of all college women who have contracted STDs were intoxicated at the time that they were infected

So why do college students continue to drink and use drugs?

Some feel pressured to use drugs or alcohol at social gatherings either because everyone else seems to be doing it, or because they believe it’s the cool thing to do. Others believe that drug or alcohol abuse offers a way to escape from school or work related stress, financial worries or relationship problems. Some feel that alcohol or drugs provide a way to compensate for feelings of shyness or low self-esteem. Sometimes, these drugs act as a substitute for satisfying relationships, educational accomplishments or self-fulfillment.

College students often forget why they are supposed to be in school. Is the purpose of university life to party all the time or to get the most out of the learning environment? Substance abuse can seriously affect academic performance. Aside from long-term addiction (or possible emptying your bank account) it can cause grades to plummet. How? Substance use affects your entire body, including your brain, in a variety of ways. Judgment is often the first attribute to be affected. You may find it difficult to make good decisions, to make them quickly or to be realistic when you make them. Suddenly, it becomes much easier to wait until the last minute to cram for that exam or to crank

out that paper. You may also find yourself having difficulty concentrating and paying attention, especially when you are in class or trying to study.

Nutritional deficits can result from extended or heavy substance use, and these deficiencies can affect your attention, concentration and ability to get along with others, as well as lead to memory loss and difficulty coping with everyday stressors. Even if you think that these long-term effects of substance abuse don't apply to you, think about how much study time you have lost because you were out partying all night and were too hung-over the next day to go to class or to work on your lab report.

Are you worried that substance abuse may be affecting you, your grades or your relationship? Have you noticed that your grades are dropping? Are classes that used to be enjoyable now very difficult or tedious? Does it seem that you never have enough time to study or get your assignments done, yet you are always at every party? You may want to consider how substance abuse could be affecting your academic performance. Take the following quiz and see how you score:

1. Have you ever felt that you should cut down on your drinking or drug use?
 Yes No
2. Have you ever felt irritated by criticism of your drinking and drug use?
 Yes No
3. Have you ever felt guilty about your drinking or drug use the next morning?
 Yes No
4. Do you ever take a drink or use drugs in the morning?
 Yes No

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may have a problem with your drug or alcohol use. Even if you are not addicted to drugs or alcohol at this time, your risk of becoming addicted is significantly increased if you continue in your current pattern of substance use. If you answered "yes" to two or more of these questions, it is very likely that you are dependent on drugs or alcohol. If you answered "yes" to three or four of these questions, there is a 95 percent chance that you are addicted.

While substance abuse is a serious problem that can affect your academic, personal and professional life very seriously, it is also a treatable problem. Many sources are available to provide you with the help you or a friend may need. Counseling and Psychological Services, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, your local spiritual leader or your family doctor can all provide you with the information needed to obtain the services that are best suited to your needs.