



Drugs and Alcohol Information

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Polydrug Use: Factsheet



Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our [Help/Q&A section](#) for more details.

Year: Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: **Drugs (General)**

Tags: **high-risk**

Time Allocated: Partial lesson (under 45mins)

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

Attachments

 [Polydrug Use: Detailed Resource \(for Parents/Teachers\)](#)

What is it?

Mixing drugs or taking more than one drug at a time is known as polydrug use. Combining drugs in this way carries extra risks and can be extremely dangerous. The more drugs a person takes at one time, the more chance there is of something going wrong.

An example of polydrug use would be smoking cannabis after drinking alcohol. Mixing alcohol with drinks that contain caffeine is another example.

What are the effects?

The effect of mixing drugs depends on which drugs are mixed together. The effects of one drug are hard to predict and are affected by:

- The drug itself (e.g. its purity, amount used, frequency of use, how the drug is used, whether the drug has been cut, or mixed with another drug);
- The person who is using the drug (e.g. their mood, expectations, personality and individual characteristics);
- The setting (e.g. where the person is, the people they are with).

Using more than one drug at a time makes the effects even more unpredictable. On top of all the factors listed above, the effect of mixing drugs depends on which drugs are mixed together. Combining drugs that have the same physical effects (e.g. two or more stimulants, or two or more depressants) is especially dangerous. This is because it increases the impact on the normal functioning of the brain and body.

Below are some possible effects of combining different combinations of drug types:

Combining Stimulants

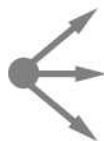
e.g. cocaine and MDMA/ecstasy



Serotonin syndrome
Psychosis
Anxiety or panic attacks
Heart problems

Combining Stimulants and Depressants

e.g. speed and alcohol



Heart problems
Respiratory infections and bronchitis
Dehydration, overheating, and kidney failure

Combining Depressants

e.g. benzodiazepines and alcohol



Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use and National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW.

