

What to do if you have concerns about...

SUBSTANCE USE

Student life goes hand in hand with **many changes**: you become more independent, you experience more (work) pressure and you have more responsibilities,... This creates new challenges such as continuing to use substances responsibly: you come into contact with alcohol, you hear about experimenting with illegal drugs and you may notice that some fellow students use stimulant medication to study better.

For some, use can become problematic, leading to dependence. But what does it mean to be addicted? Addiction can be situated on two levels:

1. **Psychological dependence** involves craving a substance more and more, without it you no longer feel good and your thoughts are completely determined by the use and how you get it.
2. **Physical dependence** occurs when your body develops tolerance to a drug. When you stop using the drug, withdrawal symptoms such as sweating, trembling and poor sleep occur.

What substances do students use?



Alcohol is very popular among students and is often seen as part of student life. It is usually used responsibly, yet there is also a lot of risky use which can cause inconvenience, study duration delays and certain health issues.

Drugs are usually used because they have a certain effect on the brain, feelings, senses and consciousness, ... These effects can vary depending on the quantity, variety and manner of use. Cannabis is the most commonly used drug among students, the use of other illegal drugs such as Xtc and cocaine is much lower.



An exam period can be very stressful, dealing with it is not self-evident. To cope with it, coffee, energy drinks, vitamin preparations or nutritional supplements are used more often during this period. Occasionally, **stimulants or medication** are also used. The most common complaints here are headaches, nervousness, nausea and abdominal pain. But more serious consequences can also manifest themselves such as sleep disturbances, heart palpitations and emotional instability.



Did you know?: *students are often afraid to talk openly about their dependency, even though it is nothing to be ashamed of. It can happen to anyone. Figures from the latest student survey on substance use show that: a quarter of students drink more than 10 glasses a week (an average of 28.5 glasses), about one in nine students (11.5%) say they have ever taken stimulant medication, almost half of students have ever used illegal drugs and nearly a quarter of them have experienced multiple adverse consequences.*

TIPS & TRICKS

Substance use is a complex issue, for which there is no one-size-fits-all treatment. Nor is it always easy to know when use is problematic.

Are you concerned about your substance use or someone else's? Here are some tips & tricks that can be a first step towards responsible use.



Alcohol

- Handle alcohol **consciously**. We often drink out of habit, or because we think it's part of the deal. Pause for a moment and think about when you drink and why you do it. Regularly planning an alcohol-free day will do wonders for your health!
- **Experiment**: which **non-alcoholic alternatives** do you like and are also fun and enjoyable to drink?
- **Alternate** a round of alcohol with something non-alcoholic. That way, you also avoid that terrible hangover the day after.
- **Take the time** to enjoy your drink.



Stimulant medication

- These **alternatives** will help you work on your concentration and memory in a sustainable way: regular exercise, sufficient sleep and rest, eating nutritious and balanced food, scheduling sufficient rest breaks and relaxation, ... (see [infographics about these topics](#))
- Do you know the **long-term effects** of using stimulants? Inform yourself about this via [the DrugLine](#).
- Always **discuss** medication use with your doctor first.



Drugs

- **Reflect** on what you want. Do you want to stop completely? Do you want to cut down? Think about this concretely and set achievable and realistic goals for yourself.
 - Here are some questions you can ask yourself: how much and how often do you want to use?
On which days do you want to use nothing at all?
- Keep **a diary** in which you note down what you use and when you use. To gain more insight into why you use, you can also note how you felt and what triggered you to use.
- **Find support!** Inform people about your plan to change and agree on how to reach them if you are having a hard time.
- **You are considering change**: great! It is normal for this to be a process with ups and downs. Allow yourself to grow in this and learn what works for you.



Contact - Talk about it

Do you recognise yourself or someone else in this information and are you worried?

- Talk about it with someone you feel comfortable with and trust.
- Are you afraid to tell someone close to you? Talk about it with your doctor or a [Student Psychologist](#).
- Would you rather tell your story anonymously? Or are you looking for more information? Then contact [The Drugline](#), for all your questions about alcohol, drugs, stimulant medication, gaming and gambling. Get in touch for free at www.druglijn.be (chat, skype and/or mail) or call 078 15 10 20 (€).