

OTHER DRUGS, OTHER ADDICTIONS

With all, all the Illicit drugs like marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, garnish all the headlines, also, right now, there's an increase in the prescription diverted drugs: Oxycontin, Vicodin, grabbing the headlines. There's still a lot of other substances that are abused and cause compulsion. Things like the anabolic steroids, inhalants, sports enhancing drugs, and even compulsive behaviors, like gambling addiction, sex addiction, internet addiction, gaming addiction that cause a lot of conflict and problems in people's lives."

"It was so fun; I thought it was like it was the biggest rush... You couldn't stop laughing, you know, you'd laugh about anything."

"You just take the lid off and breathe it in and the next thing you know just like amyl, you just flying."

National statistics indicate that 20% of high school students have had some exposure to inhalants. Huffers, inhalant abusers, are most often boys between the ages of 12 to 15-years-old, yet girls are catching up, most likely because of the popularity of nitrous oxide.

"I think when I was in like the 5th or 6th grade; I started doing nitrous with my mom. We'd go to the city and we'd just get boxes and get totally wasted."

"I just wanted to get messed up because I wanted to fit in cause other kids were doing it."

Kids don't even have to go to the store for inhalants; they go under the kitchen sink, they go into cabinets in the bathroom, or they go into the garage.

There are three classes of substances that are most often deliberately abused by inhalation;
ANESTHETICS, VOLATILE NITRITES, & ORGANIC SOLVENTS.

Anesthetics are used in the medical operating room or dental office to subdue pain and produce unconsciousness. There are a variety of anesthetic gases but the one most commonly abused is nitrous oxide which is also used as a propellant for whipped cream.

Volatile nitrites are used for the rapid blood rush to the brain caused by dilation of blood vessels. Amyl, butyl, isobutyl, and cyclohexyl nitrites are some of the chemical names of these items.

The most common class of abused inhalants are organic solvents, made from distillation of petroleum, also called hydrocarbons. There are hundreds of everyday products and industrial chemicals that contain organic solvents. Some come in liquid form and evaporate readily into gaseous form. Others come in gaseous form. They include: gasoline and gasoline enhancers, cleaning agents, spray-paint and paint thinners, cements and glues, formaldehyde and embalming fluid, typewriter correction fluid. Butane and certain propellants for spray cans.

“Butane, you just like, you take a hit wohoo you know like our whole body, you get like a more body high.”

When the fumes from inhalants are breathed into the lungs, the effects take place rapidly. The lungs are the most efficient means of drug delivery to the brain; that’s why a user gets an immediate rush of intense sensations.

“When you were real high and, and it was perfect but then you would get higher and there was no turning back once you had inhaled the stuff.”

Normally, oxygen coming into the lungs is exchanged for outgoing carbon dioxide in the tiny air sacs called alveoli. The oxygenated blood then travels throughout the body. When vaporized gases are inhaled instead, they displace the oxygen and the blood carries the inhalants to the rest of the body, especially the brain. This causes sensations of numbness, tingling, and occasionally unconsciousness. The use of inhalants impairs the functioning of the brain, particularly memory.

“It affects your short term mem, memory because you are not listening, you are not paying attention. You don’t care.”

Nitrous oxide, nicknamed laughing gas, produces an anesthesia, giddiness, and lightheadedness.

“I felt like my head was in a bell that just rang and just totally just shaking you know. I was shaking laughing and my face was pale again and my lips were pale and my lips were blue.”

Unfortunately, oxygen deprivation leading to passing out is particularly acute with nitrous oxide.

Nitrites are primarily used in the gay community for their disinhibiting effects. They dilate blood vessels sending a rush of blood to the brain, increase the heart rate but lower blood pressure. Nitrites also relax smooth muscles and produce a sensation of heat and excitement that can last for several minutes.

“Heart would race, and just boom-boom-boom-boom in your chest and it would feel like it wanted to burst out, it would feel like all the bloods rushing to your head. Um, um I’ve seen myself in the mirror after doing it, bright red, um; I don’t imagine that’s a good sign.”

Organic solvents are the most widely abused of the inhalants. Some are extremely toxic, so manufacturers give estimates of the levels of exposure that are safe for those that use them in a work environment. Huffers often inhale 20-50 times the amount of inhalant that is considered safe by the manufacturers.

“I just like kept hittin’ it no matter what. I mean even though I felt sick and my vision went blurry and I was stumbling, fell on the floor drooling on myself, I always ended up still hittin’ it you know.”

“One of the big reasons why inhalants continue to be popular among, amongst young people, is that if they take enough of it, it produces a major psychedelic effect. It produces the stimulation,

reduces depression but ultimately it causes the person to have an altruistic conscientiousness, where they hallucinate they have detachments, they see visions, they experience things that aren't commonly experienced in their reality."

In addition to damaging brain cells, organic solvents, particularly if over used, can directly damage lung tissue and in some cases, even freeze it."

"I was hitting end dust and then I was just, I hit it so hard this one time, like, that I felt my lungs were gonna collapse cause it was so cold."

Chronic abusers also damage the cerebellum, the part of the brain that controls balance and coordination. A permanent affect of use could be muscle tremors and uncontrollable shaking.

"Once the person is removed from the inhalant, they're stabilized, their medical system is a success their physiological system is a success, then it becomes just like treating alcoholism, cocaine, methamphetamine addiction, a major look at why a person is using, address the factors that caused them to use and then address relapse, the potential for relapse, which is tremendously severe with inhalant abuse."

"If I would have known what I know about these things I damn well wouldn't have gone near it. I didn't have any idea that my head was going to suffer the way it did."

"Winning is not everything. I mean, I think a lot of people sometimes they put too much pressure on being #1 and they may want to cheat."

The modern sports-drug era began in the 1930s with the synthesis of testosterone, steroids, and amphetamines, the stimulant, amphetamine was given to soldiers on both sides during World War II to increase aggression, enhance endurance and delay fatigue. The transition of these drugs from war to sports was unfortunately natural.

There are three main categories of drugs used in sports.

There are therapeutic drugs, used for specific medical problems and usually administered with proper medical supervision.

There are performance-enhancing drugs (ergogenic drugs), such as steroids, growth hormones and amphetamines. Some legal, some illegal. Most are banned from competition.

And finally, there are mood-altering drugs, both legal and illegal.

Therapeutic sports drugs fall into four main groups

anti-inflammatories;

pain killers including analgesics and anesthetics;

muscle relaxants;

and asthma medications.

"That's a pretty good bruise. Kind of got a hard little knot there. Did you ice it?"

"No."

"No, of course not."

“The more potent analgesics, the opiate based type analgesics like codeine or meperidine, or morphine although they are a very potent pain killing medication and do that very well, they also have wild side effects in terms of drowsiness, constipation and have a very strong potential for addiction if used in excessive amounts for too long a period of time.”

Athletes use performance-enhancing drugs are used for several reasons: They believe these substances increase strength, size, and endurance; boost confidence and aggressiveness, and most important, according to a survey of the athletes themselves, speed up the healing process after an injury.

Athletes use anabolic-androgenic steroids because they increase the levels of certain proteins in the large muscle fibers. When extremely high-dose use is combined with intense power training, along with a high protein diet, the muscles absorb more fluids and create more fibers, thereby causing the increase in size and strength.

The thinner fibers in muscles that are used in endurance activities, such as long-distance running, are not improved with the use of anabolic steroids.

“Basically I go on about 10 weeks, then I’ll go off for a little while. So I would kind of cycle it to where it would peak me out at a certain time in the season.”

Although some users might not show any sign that steroids are being used, others can experience one or more of the following symptoms.

“They are testosterone-like substances or, and therefore they have masculinizing effects. In addition to that, some of their break-down products or metabolites also have estrogen or feminizing effects.”

In males affects include shrinkage of the testicles, baldness, prostate problems and enlarged breasts. In females, it could be shrinkage of the breasts, deepening of the voice, abnormal clitoral growth, and facial hair.

Cycling on and off steroids also creates a hormonal seesaw resulting in sudden changes in mood and drive. The most common mood change is an increased feeling of aggressiveness and assertiveness, sometimes called roid rage.

Central nervous system stimulants, known as uppers, often start out as performance boosters. Most of them also have a strong abuse and addiction liability. Stimulants include methamphetamines, diet pills, methylphenidate or Ritalin, ephedrine, nicotine, caffeine, and occasionally cocaine.

If the desire to lose weight becomes an obsession, some athletes will resort to illegal amphetamines, laxatives, diuretics, excessive exercise, and even self-induced vomiting.

Besides steroids, stimulants, and diuretics, athletes have tried a large variety of drugs to try and improve their performance. For example, Growth hormones particularly HGH, a drug prohibited by most sports governing bodies, occur naturally in the human body and are used to promote growth in underdeveloped children. Studies have shown that HGH will slightly increase lean body mass but not increase skeletal muscle mass or strength.

“Because there’s so much development, in a rapid development in these substances, the laws can’t even keep up with them so as far as I see there’s going to be continued conflict, a problem of trying to identify and to recognize and monitor for performance enhancing for sports, sports approved drugs.”

So called 'natural' nutritional supplements have been used for thousands of years to try and improve athletic performance. One current popular nutritional supplement is a meat protein extract called creatine, which increases the ability to work out longer. (MUSIC)

Some of these supplements may be adulterated with banned substances which can result in an athlete’s ineligibility from competition.

“When you have a problem with alcohol or marijuana, things like that, of that nature, you’ll see a decline in their academics. You’ll see a decline in their athletics. You just see a decline in everything and, and we see it as coaches and the players see it so we try to address it right away.”

One or more of the same problems occur with almost any of the recreational or street drugs that are used.

“It starts with the coach as far as um, setting the guidelines and the rules and situation to keep the team cohesive, you know. Once the rules and guidelines are set, it’s up to the players to have focus enough to have the maturity enough to go by those rules and to follow the guidelines”

“I think the thing I would try to say to a teammate if I found out they were using drugs, you know, I’d tell them, you know, hey, hey man, it’s not worth it. You know, you’re risking your life here and is running fast or throwing far worth all that.”

“I play a game called Medieval Total War, up on my computer. You build a huge empire, you have huge armies and you defeat other factions.”

It is not only psychoactive drugs that can be addictive. Any behavior that becomes compulsive and is continued despite the damage it does to ones life, is considered an addiction.

“When I played World of Warcraft, um, I was in high school and my grades were dropping severely, because of it.”

Pathological gambling, compulsive shopping, compulsive overeating, sexual addiction, excessive TV watching, and internet addictions such as online gaming, are the most common behavioral addictions.

“Um, putting somewhere around 15-20 hours a day, into a video game and living off of junk food and you know whatever they can find and pretty much not being self sufficient in a society anymore.”

The areas of the brain activated by behavioral addictions are generally the same as those activated by most drug addictions, particularly the reward reinforcement pathway. For example, those areas of the brain activated by gambling and computer games such as the amygdala, the emotional center, are almost identical to those stimulated by cocaine and methamphetamine,

“I’m making it sound like Meth but if you, you just, you know, spend all of your time, all of your, you know freedom, just playing video games all day, all night you know, its pathetic.”

The areas of the brain excited by food, especially refined carbohydrates, are those that are also activated by alcohol. In fact, one of the main genes that signify a powerful susceptibility to alcoholism and drug addiction, the DRD2A1 allele gene, also signifies a susceptibility to compulsive gambling, compulsive sexual behavior, and compulsive overeating.

“Food does for me what alcohol and drugs and other things do for other people. If I’m feeling angry and I eat, it takes the anger. If I’m feeling lonely or sad and I eat, it takes, takes care of the feelings. If, if, I feel inadequate or empty. I fill myself with food. Or I used to. I don’t do it anymore.”

“I’d take money from my parents, my grandparents. I conned anybody I could, um, and started even stealing from the places where I worked just so I’d have money to gamble and that was probably no more than 6 months into my gambling.”

“I’ve never really been interested in sports and stuff like that, but a sex and sexual issues is, is the one that has always really you know been a key factor in helping me to calm down and, and slow my mind down so I don’t have to think about other things.”

The most characteristic sign of addiction is continued use despite negative consequences.

Ian: “Marriages, children out of custody, their house, their job, all of that, all that can be lost just by getting too absorbed into another dimension.”

“There were times I knew he was a gambling but oh I’ll, I’ll never do this again, so, cash in a CD and bail him out or go to the savings and bail him out and um, um, it really came to a head this past summer when um, I found out that we had spent all the money we had just recently borrowed to, in refinancing our home or getting a second mortgage.”

“When you’re treating a behavior um, such as gambling addiction, such as sex addiction, such as a compulsive internet, internet gaming addiction at least you don’t have to worry too much about the physiology, physiology that’s been altered by the chemical substances, you can concentrate on the a thought process, on the behavior, on what are the things in a persons emotions that lead him to continue to need to alter their states of consciousness with this behavior.”