



**SA Federation for
Mental Health**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health – Drug Abuse

When you have a substance abuse problem and a mental health issue such as depression, bipolar disorder, or anxiety at the same time, it is called a dual diagnosis. In a dual diagnosis, both the mental health disorder and the drug or alcohol addiction have their own symptoms that may affect a person's ability to function, handle life's difficulties, and relate to others. These co-occurring disorders also affect each other and interact. Many people who are addicted to drugs are also diagnosed with other mental disorders, including anxiety and depression. Some people develop mental health problems because of their drug use, and some people take drugs in an attempt to alleviate symptoms of mental health disorders.

Drugs such as dagga, ecstasy and heroin have the ability to affect your mood. They can cause certain emotions or dampen down others. This may be why you use them. The changes in your mood or behaviour caused by drugs are the result of changes to your brain. This is also the part of you that controls your mental health.

Some drugs cause a condition called drug-induced Psychosis, which usually passes after a few days. However, if someone has a predisposition to a psychotic illness such as Schizophrenia, drugs may trigger the first episode in what can be a lifelong mental illness. Using drugs can also make the symptoms of mental illnesses worse and make treatment less effective.

According to reports published in the Journal of the American Medical Association:

- Roughly 50 percent of individuals with severe mental disorders are affected by substance abuse
- 37 percent of alcohol abusers and 53 percent of drug abusers also have at least one serious mental illness
- Of all people diagnosed as mentally ill, 29 percent abuse either alcohol or drugs

The psychological effects of drugs –

Dagga (marijuana, cannabis)

People take dagga as a way of relaxing and getting high. If you have experience of anxiety and depression, you are more likely to experience negative side effects.

Type of drug	Stimulant, depressant and hallucinogen
Short-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling relaxed• Talkative• Finding things very funny and laughing a lot• Feeling excited by the things you see, hear and feel• Hunger <p>High doses may cause:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distorted perceptions• Forgetfulness• Distress and confusion• Psychotic experiences (hallucinations and other experiences which other people don't share)
Long-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long-lasting symptoms of psychosis that may be diagnosed as schizophrenia• May trigger serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or depression

Amphetamines; methylamphetamine (crystal meth, Tik)

The effects of crystal meth are similar to crack cocaine, but they last longer. If you have a mental health problem and use amphetamines, you are more likely to experience negative effects.

Type of drug	Stimulant
Short-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased attention and alertness• Reduced tiredness• Increased energy and confidence

Long-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agitation • Confusion • Aggression • Can cause symptoms of psychosis, such as paranoia
Withdrawal symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Depression • Tiredness • Irritability

Cocaine

Cocaine comes in two forms: cocaine powder which is snorted, and crack cocaine which is smoked. Both forms may be injected. Cocaine is often impure, and may contain other substances. Cocaine is extremely addictive, and it is very difficult to stop taking it. If you have a mental health problem, cocaine can make this worse.

Type of drug	Stimulant
Short-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling wide awake • Full of energy • Feeling confident <p>High doses may cause:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hallucinations and delusions • Depression • Suicidal thoughts
Long-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Anxiety • Panic attacks • Paranoia • Irreversible brain damage • A worsening of pre-existing mental health problems
Dependency and withdrawal symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of energy • Psychosis • Depression • Akathisia (a feeling of intense restlessness)

Ecstasy (MDMA)

Ecstasy tablets are usually impure, and often contain substances other than MDMA.

Type of drug	Stimulant
Short-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling happy and relaxed• Feelings of empathy, openness, caring and emotional closeness to others
Long-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Depression, which does not respond to antidepressants• Loss of confidence• Anxiety• Confusion• Agitation and teeth clenching• Panic attacks after repeated use• Hallucinations and paranoia after repeated high doses

Heroin

The main effects of heroin are pain relief, and euphoria – but also depression.

Type of drug	Opium-related painkiller/depressant
Short-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A rush of pleasure, followed by a calm, warm, dreamy contentment• Drowsiness• Talkativeness• Loss of appetite• Insomnia• Lethargy
Long-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of appetite• Apathy• Neglect of personal safety and hygiene• Generalised pain when the level of drug in your system drops

Dependency and withdrawal symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A craving that leads to serious social problems including crime • Severe physical withdrawal symptoms • A tolerance of the drug, which means you need to take more of it to achieve the same effect
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CAT (Khat)

Khat or Cat commonly refers to two types of drugs. Although similar, one is the leaf from the shrub *catha edulis* which contains Cathinone and is also called khat. The other is a synthetic powder which contains Methcathinone and has the street name CAT.

Type of drug	Stimulant
Short-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling excited and energetic • Not being able to sleep • Loss of appetite • Relaxation • Feeling sociable • Hearing voices (associated with high doses) • Paranoia (associated with high doses)
Dependence and withdrawal symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiredness • Depression • Anxiety • Irritability

LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide)

LSD may cause you to hallucinate and lose touch with your surroundings, and as a result it can cause people to do dangerous things.

Type of drug	Hallucinogen
Short-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detachment from surroundings • Altered sense of space and time • Hallucinations • Feelings of insight, mysticism and spirituality • Feeling you can fly • Anxiety (associated with a bad trip)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling panicky (associated with a bad trip)
Long-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to make existing symptoms of schizophrenia worse • Flashbacks of bad trips, when you feel you are reliving them again

Solvents

Solvents, glues, gases and aerosols are sometimes used when people are unable to access alcohol or other substances.

Type of drug	Depressant
Short-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings similar to getting drunk • Dizziness • Euphoria • Loss of inhibition • Pseudo-hallucinations (hallucinations that you know are not real) • Repeated sniffing can cause a hangover effect, making you pale, very tired, forgetful and unable to concentrate

Signs and symptoms of drug abuse or addiction –

Behavioural changes, such as:

- Drop in attendance and performance at work or school
- Frequently getting into trouble (fights, accidents, illegal activities)
- Using substances in dangerous situations such as while driving or operating a machine
- Engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviour
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Changes in personality or attitude
- Sudden mood swings, irritability, or angry outbursts
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity, agitation, or giddiness
- Lacking of motivation
- Appearing fearful, anxious, or paranoid, with no reason

Physical changes, such as:

- Bloodshot eyes and abnormally sized pupils
- Sudden weight loss or weight gain

- Deterioration of physical appearance
- Unusual smells on breath, body, or clothing
- Tremors, slurred speech, or impaired coordination

Social changes, such as:

- Sudden change in friends, favourite hangouts, and hobbies
- Legal problems related to substance use
- Unexplained need for money or financial problems
- Using substances even though it causes problems in relationships

If you or someone you know suffers from substance abuse or addiction problems, please contact The South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse on 086 14 72622, or seek the help of a licensed medical practitioner.