

## **Facts About Using Substances**

**The best way to take care of your health is to choose NOT to use substances at all. No amount is safe.**

Many teens choose not to use substances at all or delay using until they are older. Alcohol, marijuana (weed/pot), and nicotine (vaping/cigarettes) are the most common substances used by teens.

Planning ahead may help you stick with your decision not to use substances:

- If possible, avoid places or situations where others are using substances.
- Choose alternate activities or different friend groups.
- If you know you are going somewhere where people will be using substances, plan how you will handle these situations and tell your friends before going that you will not be using substances.

### **How do I say “no” if I feel that I am being pressured to use a particular substance?**



- Look right at the person and say, “No thanks.” “Using is something that I just don’t want to do.” Also, you may ask the person not to ask you again by saying, “I’m good with my decision, so please don’t ask again.”
- Say why: “I’ll lose the car if my parents find out” or “I have to practice with my team or band tomorrow.”
- It is OK to leave a party or group if others are using and you don’t want to take part.
- Ask for respect: “Please respect my decision not to use substances.”

### **What if I use substances to help me when I am stressed?**

- Sometimes teens use substances when they are stressed or down, but, in the long run, substance use can make your mood or stress worse. Support is available to help you with managing stress, mental health problems and substance use.

### **Short- and long-term risks to using substances**

- The earlier you start using substances, the greater your chances that you will continue to use them later in your life. Your brain (until you are about 25) is not FULLY developed and can really be harmed by using alcohol, marijuana and other drugs.
- Regular use of marijuana in any form can affect your memory or your ability to learn. Even stopping may not fully repair your brain.
- In the short term, vaping can affect your lungs (coughing, breathing) and lead to serious lung injury or even death. This happens because of the ingredients contained in the vaping aerosol (what comes out of a vape). Long-term harm from vaping is not yet known.
- Nicotine use (including both cigarettes and vaping) can lead to nicotine/tobacco addiction and using other substances.
- Marijuana use has been linked to mental health problems because of THC and other chemicals it can contain. Marijuana can also affect the way you think, behave, and feel and make it harder for you to focus in school and while driving (slower to see traffic lights and signs, drifting within your lane). Increased risk is linked to using alcohol and marijuana together.
- If you plan on driving a car, riding a scooter or a bicycle, do not use cannabis, alcohol or other drugs.
- Drinking alcohol can result in injuries and/or death, suicidal behaviour, car crashes, and problems with school, family and friends. This happens because your ability to think, be aware of risks and have control over your body is reduced when you drink alcohol.



### **Resources** (Images courtesy of [www.freepik.com/free-photo](http://www.freepik.com/free-photo) )

- A helpful Canadian website with some interactive games: Island Health (BC) at [www.islandhealth.ca/learn-about-health/youth-substance-use/youth-family-substance-use-resources](http://www.islandhealth.ca/learn-about-health/youth-substance-use/youth-family-substance-use-resources).
- A fun, interactive website at <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/teens>. It includes interactive games such as Kahoot and Jeopardy-style challenges (<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/teens/games>); blogs (<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog>); and videos (<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/teens/videos>).
- Another interactive website: The Center for Alcohol and Drug Resources at [www.tcadr.org/virtual/educational-interactive-activities.html](http://www.tcadr.org/virtual/educational-interactive-activities.html).

