

Mastering Addiction 1

Y10 RHSE [PD] Extraction 2026+

Legal, Semi-Legal, Illegal Drugs: Which is Which?

Legal drugs (regulated medicines & substances)

These are legal when used as prescribed or sold under regulation.

Examples

Alcohol (ethanol)

Nicotine (cigarettes, vapes)

Prescription medicines (e.g., benzodiazepines, opioids, antidepressants)

Over-the-counter medicines (paracetamol, ibuprofen)

Key risks

Dependence (especially alcohol, opioids, benzodiazepines)

Overdose if misused (e.g., opioids + alcohol)

Long-term organ damage (liver, brain, heart)

Interaction risks (mixing sedatives can suppress breathing)



Legal, Semi-Legal, Illegal Drugs: Which is Which?



Non-Smoker



Smoker

Tobacco (cigarettes and other smoked products)

Tobacco contains nicotine, a highly addictive drug, but most harm comes from the burning process (combustion), which produces thousands of chemicals.

Major risks:

Cancer (lung, throat, mouth, bladder, pancreas)

Heart disease and stroke

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

Reduced fertility and pregnancy complications

Weakened immune system

Reduced life expectancy (often 10+ years)

Burning tobacco produces:

Tar

Carbon monoxide

Formaldehyde and other toxic chemicals

These damage DNA, lungs, and blood vessels.

Keyword / Team Word Webbing:

Each team member writes one thing down that was on the first two slides

Legal, Semi-Legal, Illegal Drugs: Which is Which?

Semi-legal / grey market substances

Often:

- legal in some forms but misused
- sold online or diverted from medical use
- or sold as “research chemicals”

Key risks

Unknown potency

Poor quality control

Unstudied long-term effects

Rapid emergence of new compounds faster than regulation

Examples

Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) – legal for medical use but misused recreationally in many places

“Research chemicals” (synthetic cannabinoids, novel benzodiazepines)



Legal, Semi-Legal, Illegal Drugs: Which is Which?

Vaping (e-cigarettes)

Vapes heat a liquid (e-liquid) that usually contains:

nicotine
propylene glycol and vegetable glycerine
flavourings

No tobacco is burned.

Health risks

Known or likely harms:

- Nicotine addiction (can be strong, especially in youth)
- Throat and airway irritation
- Coughing and short-term breathing issues in some users
- Possible cardiovascular effects (still being studied)
- Unknown long-term effects (vapes are relatively new)



Legal, Semi-Legal, Illegal Drugs: Which is Which?

Illegal drugs

These are controlled due to high harm potential.

Examples

- Cocaine
- Heroin
- MDMA (ecstasy)
- Cannabis (illegal in UK for recreational use)
- LSD, psilocybin (illegal in UK in most contexts)

Key risks

Addiction and dependence

Mental health effects (anxiety, psychosis in some users)

Overdose (especially opioids and stimulants)

Contaminants and adulteration
(major modern risk)



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Adulteration (drug “contamination”)

Highly potent synthetic opioids in heroin & counterfeit pills

Substances such as:

- **Nitazenes** (extremely potent synthetic opioids)
- illicit **fentanyl analogues**, increasingly found in **heroin** supplies and **counterfeit painkillers** (fake oxycodone, tramadol, diazepam tablets)

They can be many times stronger than heroin

Very small dosing errors can cause fatal overdose

Users often don't know they are present

Veterinary sedatives in street drugs

A key example is **xylazine** which is a **veterinary tranquiliser** (not approved for human use). Found in **heroin, counterfeit tablets**, and even **vapes** in some cases

Health risks

Severe sedation and unconsciousness

Dangerous drops in breathing and heart rate

Skin ulcers and tissue damage in prolonged use

Synthetic cannabinoids in vapes (“Spice-like” contamination)

Illicit vape liquids or THC vapes may contain:

- **synthetic cannabinoids** (much stronger than cannabis)
- **unknown solvents or cutting agents**
- sometimes **sedatives** or **opioids**

Risks

Seizures

Psychosis and paranoia

Heart problems

Unpredictable intoxication

Adulteration (drug “contamination”)

Illicit vape risks (important emerging issue)

Possible contaminants

- **THC** (in unregulated form)
- **synthetic cannabinoids**
- **sedatives**
- **opioids**
- **industrial solvents** or **cutting agents**

Health risks

- lung injury (chemical irritation or toxicity)
- sudden loss of consciousness
- heart rhythm disturbances
- unpredictable overdose effects

A major issue is that vape liquids can hide dissolved drugs with no visible indication of contamination.

Counterfeit medicines (fake prescription drugs)

What they are disguised as:

- **Xanax**
- **Painkillers**
- **Diazepam**
- **ADHD medications**

What they may actually contain:

- **nitazenes** (very strong synthetic opioids)
- **fentanyl**
- entirely different drugs than labelled

Why this is especially dangerous

Users take “known doses” that are actually unpredictable

No quality control or sterile manufacturing

High risk of fatal overdose from a single pill

Adulteration (drug “contamination”)

Why modern drug risk is increasing

1. Potency escalation
2. Supply chain contamination
3. Rapid chemical innovation
4. Polydrug mixtures

This increases overdose risk significantly.



Main health dangers (across all categories)

Immediate risks

Overdose (respiratory depression or heart failure)

Seizures

Unconsciousness

Acute psychosis or panic

Accidents/injuries while intoxicated

Long-term risks

Addiction and dependence

Brain changes affecting mood and memory

Liver and kidney damage

Mental health disorders

(depression, anxiety, psychosis)

Social and economic harm

Key harm reduction principles

Even though avoiding illegal drugs entirely is safest, **public health guidance focuses on reducing harm:**

- avoid mixing depressants (e.g. opioids + alcohol/benzodiazepines)
- assume unknown strength in illicit supply
- be aware that vapes and pills may be counterfeit
- use drug-checking services where available
- never use alone (overdose response time matters)
- naloxone can reverse opioid overdoses (but not all sedatives)

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How vaping helps adults quit smoking

Why it works

- Delivers nicotine without smoke toxins
- Mimics the hand-to-mouth habit
- Allows gradual nicotine reduction
- Can reduce withdrawal symptoms

Evidence on effectiveness

Studies show:

- Vapes can be more effective than nicotine gum or patches alone for some smokers
- Many adults successfully switch completely from smoking to vaping
- Best outcomes occur when vaping is combined with behavioural support



Two Methods Adults Use to Quit Smoking

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)

These are medical products designed for quitting smoking:

Examples

- Patches
- Gum
- Lozenges
- nasal spray
- Inhalators

How they help

- provide controlled nicotine doses
- reduce withdrawal symptoms
- no harmful smoke toxins

Safety

- far safer than smoking
- widely used in NHS stop-smoking services

Risk and Alcohol Consumption

Legal age of alcohol sale in England

In England, the legal age for buying or being sold alcohol is **18 years old**

Exceptions (limited and controlled) **16–17-year-olds** may drink:

- beer, wine, or cider with a meal in a licensed premises
- but cannot buy alcohol themselves

It is illegal to sell alcohol to anyone under 18 or to buy alcohol for them in most situations

Alcohol dependence (addiction)

Signs include:

craving alcohol

needing more to feel the same effect (tolerance)

withdrawal symptoms (sweating, shaking, anxiety, nausea)

difficulty controlling drinking

Physical health risks of alcohol

Alcohol is a toxic, psychoactive drug that affects nearly every organ system.

Short-term physical risks:

impaired coordination and reaction time (accidents, falls)

alcohol poisoning (can be fatal)

vomiting and dehydration

slowed breathing in severe overdose

increased risk of injury or violence

Long-term physical risks:

liver disease (fatty liver, hepatitis, cirrhosis)

heart disease and high blood pressure

cancers (mouth, throat, liver, breast, bowel)

Pancreatitis

brain changes affecting memory and cognition

weakened immune system

Risk and Alcohol Consumption

Psychological and mental health risks

Alcohol is a depressant, meaning it slows brain function.

Short-term effects:

lowered inhibitions (risk-taking behaviour)

poor judgement and impulsivity

mood swings, aggression or emotional volatility

memory blackouts (alcohol-induced amnesia)

Long-term effects:

increased risk of depression and anxiety disorders

alcohol dependence (addiction)

worsened sleep quality

cognitive decline with heavy long-term use

increased risk of self-harm in vulnerable individuals

Alcohol poisoning (overdose)

Alcohol poisoning occurs when blood alcohol levels become dangerously high.

Warning signs:

- confusion or unconsciousness
- vomiting repeatedly
- slow or irregular breathing
- pale or blue-tinged skin
- Seizures

Risk factors:

- binge drinking
- mixing alcohol with sedatives (e.g. benzodiazepines)
- drinking on an empty stomach



Risk and Alcohol Consumption

Drink spiking: risks and prevention

Drink spiking involves adding alcohol or drugs to a drink without consent.

Substances sometimes used:

- extra alcohol
- sedatives
- sometimes other drugs

Effects:

- sudden dizziness or blackout
- confusion or inability to stand
- memory loss
- vulnerability to harm or exploitation

Alcohol, drugs, and sexual risk behaviour

Key risks include:

1. Reduced consent clarity
2. Increased risky decisions
3. Vulnerability to harm
4. Physical safety risks

How to reduce risk:

never leave drinks unattended

don't accept drinks from strangers without seeing them prepared

avoid sharing drinks

use bottle stoppers or drink covers in crowded settings

stick with trusted friends and use a "buddy system"

if a drink tastes strange, stop drinking it



Risk and Alcohol Consumption

Methanol poisoning risk

Methanol is a toxic alcohol sometimes found in illicitly produced spirits.

Why it is dangerous:

- the body converts methanol into formaldehyde and formic acid
- these can cause blindness, organ failure, or death

Symptoms (often delayed 6–24 hours):

blurred vision or “snowy” vision

severe headache

nausea and vomiting

abdominal pain

confusion or drowsiness

How to reduce risk:

- only drink alcohol from legal, licensed sources
- avoid unlabelled, home-distilled, or counterfeit spirits
- be cautious when travelling in countries with weak alcohol regulation
- do not consume alcohol sold in informal settings or unknown origin

Methanol poisoning is mainly a risk from illicitly produced alcohol, not standard UK retail products.



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Law: Semi-legal Substances

Prescription-only medicines (misuse is illegal)

Examples:

- Codeine
- Diazepam (Valium)
- Tramadol
- ADHD medications (e.g. methylphenidate)

Legal situation:

Legal only with a prescription

Illegal to possess without prescription or to supply/divert



Nitrous oxide (“laughing gas”)

Previously widely available, now restricted in the UK

Illegal to supply or possess with intent to inhale for psychoactive effect under recent laws

Risks:

- oxygen deprivation
- nerve damage with repeated use

“Legal highs” / New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Many banned under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016

This law makes it illegal to supply or produce substances intended for psychoactive effects if not exempt (like alcohol, nicotine, caffeine)

Examples affected:

- synthetic cannabinoids (“Spice”)
- many “research chemicals”

Legal principle:

Even if a drug is new and not named, it can still be illegal if it is psychoactive and not exempt.



Misuse: Prescribed and Over-the-Counter Medicines

Misuse includes:

- taking a higher dose than prescribed or recommended
- taking medication not prescribed for you
- using medicine for its “high” or sedative effects
- mixing medicines in unsafe ways (or with alcohol/drugs)
- using expired or counterfeit medication

Overdose

Taking too much can overwhelm the body and cause:

organ failure (liver, kidneys)

slowed or stopped breathing (especially opioids or sedatives)

Seizures

coma or death

Even common medicines can be dangerous in overdose e.g.

Paracetamol overdose can cause severe liver failure, sometimes with delayed symptoms.

Organ damage from long-term misuse

Liver damage (paracetamol, some herbal mixtures)

Kidney damage (some painkillers like ibuprofen when overused)

Stomach bleeding or ulcers (ibuprofen/aspirin)

Heart strain or high blood pressure
(decongestants, stimulants)

Dangerous interactions

Mixing medicines or combining with alcohol/drugs can cause:

extreme drowsiness or unconsciousness

slowed breathing

irregular heartbeat

increased toxicity of one or both substances

Misuse: Prescribed and Over-the-Counter Medicines

Dependence and withdrawal

Some prescription medicines can cause addiction:

- opioids (e.g. codeine, morphine)
- benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam)
- some sleep medications

Effects:

tolerance (needing more for same effect)
cravings
withdrawal symptoms (anxiety, shaking, insomnia, seizures in severe cases)

Psychological and behavioural risks

confusion or memory problems
mood changes (depression, anxiety, irritability)
impaired judgement and decision-making
increased risk-taking behaviour
dependence and compulsive use patterns

Specific risks from over-the-counter medicines

OTC medicines are often seen as “safe,” but misuse can still be serious:

Painkillers

Paracetamol: liver failure (can be life-threatening even at relatively modest excess doses over time)

Ibuprofen/aspirin: stomach bleeding, kidney damage

Cold/flu medicines

decongestants can raise heart rate and blood pressure
antihistamines can cause severe drowsiness and confusion in high doses

Risk of masking serious illness

Misusing medication can:

- hide symptoms of a serious condition
- delay proper treatment
- worsen underlying illness

Law: Illegal drugs (controlled substances)

Class A (highest penalties)

Examples:

- Cocaine
- Heroin
- MDMA (ecstasy)
- LSD
- Methamphetamine

Legal consequences:

Possession: up to 7 years in prison and/or unlimited fine

Supply/trafficking: up to life imprisonment

Driving under influence: separate offences also apply

Class B

Examples:

- Cannabis (illegal for recreational use in the UK)
- Amphetamines
- Ketamine (increasingly strictly controlled)

Legal consequences:

Possession: up to 5 years in prison and/or fine

Supply: up to 14 years in prison



In the UK, most illegal drugs are covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which classifies drugs into Class A, B, and C based on perceived harm

Class C

Examples:

- Some benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam without prescription)
- GHB/GBL (in certain contexts)
- Anabolic steroids (possession legal for personal use, but supply is illegal)

Legal consequences:

Possession: up to 2 years in prison and/or fine

Supply: up to 14 years in prison

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Faith-Based Views on These Areas

Christianity

Most Christian teaching emphasises that the body is a gift from God and should not be harmed or abused. Intoxication and addiction are generally discouraged because they impair judgement and moral responsibility.

Key teachings

- Avoid drunkenness and loss of self-control
- Treat the body with respect
- Seek sobriety and wise decision-making

Quotes

- “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.” Ephesians 5:18 (Bible)
- “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... therefore honour God with your body.” 1 Corinthians 6:19–20

Islam

Islam generally takes a strict prohibition approach to intoxicants, based on the idea that they harm judgement, behaviour, and spiritual awareness.

Key teachings

- Intoxicants are forbidden (haram)
- Anything that impairs reasoning is discouraged or prohibited
- Protecting life and health is a key principle

Quotes

- “Intoxicants and gambling... are an abomination of Satan’s handiwork, so avoid them.” Qur’an 5:90
- “They ask you about wine and gambling. Say: in them is great sin...” Qur’an 2:219

Buddhism

Buddhism strongly discourages intoxicants because they cloud mindfulness and right judgement.

- Follow the Five Precepts (ethical guidelines)
- Avoid substances that cloud the mind

Quote

- “I undertake the training rule to abstain from intoxicating drink and drugs that lead to heedlessness.” Fifth Precept

Citizenship Views

NHS Health Survey for England 2024

Alcohol

- 76–77% of adults drink alcohol
- 51% drank in the last week
- 21% drink above the recommended 14 units per week
- 4% drink at “higher-risk” levels
Around 9,800–10,400 alcohol-specific deaths per year in the UK (recent years)
- Over 1 million alcohol-related hospital admissions per year in England
- 40–50% of violent crime incidents involve alcohol use by offender, victim, or both (UK crime surveys estimate range)

Smoking

- 74,000 deaths per year in the UK
- Around 1 in 2 long-term smokers dies from smoking-related disease

Drug Poisoning

Over 3,000–5,000 drug poisoning deaths per year in England and Wales

Association to Crime [Risk Amplifier]

- 40-60% of domestic abuse incidents involve alcohol use by the perpetrator.
- 15-30% of domestic abuse cases involve drug use by the perpetrator.
- 40-50% of violent offences involve alcohol use by the perpetrator.
- 30-50% of sexual assault cases involve alcohol use by either party.

Headline: Summarise the work from the sheet in your books using a snappy title.