



# Drugs – ABCs

## Alcohol

**Active ingredient:** ethyl alcohol (ethanol)

**Form of consumption:** drunk in various forms and mixtures with very diverse alcohol contents between 2 percent (fermented mare's milk, 'kumis') and 95 percent (corn schnapps, 'Everclear').

**Effect:** white paper 'The real truth about drugs and their effects on the body', page 5.

**Prevalence:** in the countries of the European Union, consumption among people over 15 is 12.5 liters of pure alcohol annually – which is twice as high as the global average.

**Risks:** the EU and WHO list more than 40 recognized alcohol related diseases, alcohol also "plays a role in numerous other health problems, such as injuries and fatalities on the roads." In the countries of the EU, 10.8 percent of all deaths in 2004 in the age group between 15 and 64 were a result of alcohol consumption. Another 3.3 percent of this age group died as the result of other people's alcohol consumption.

**Origins and history:** Since prehistoric times people have crafted drinks containing the potable alcohol, ETHANOL.

**Synonyms:** booze, hooch, firewater.

**Fortification:** around 3100 BC, workers on the pyramids were given five liters of beer daily as a supplement to their diet and to keep their mood up.

## Benzodiazepines

**Active ingredient:** a group of compounds whose basic constituents are 1,4- or 1,5-benzodiazepines. They were developed as tranquilizers for calming



A drug's effect and risk cannot be seen from the outside

and sleep-inducing purposes; their international non-proprietary names often end in -azepam: Diazepam, Lorazepam and Oxazepam. Trade names include Valium, Librium, Rohypnol, Tavor, and Praxiten.

**Form of consumption:** as tablets or injected intravenously.

**Effect:** anxiolytic, relaxing, soothing.

**Risks:** memory disorders, impaired reactions, and perception – consequently: driving impairment; addictive if taken long-term without medical supervision.

**Origins and history:** traces of benzodiazepines occur in human and animal blood as well as certain plants. They were discovered more or less by accident in the USA in 1957. The first medicine in this group came onto the market in 1960 under the name Librium, and Valium followed in 1963. It was not until the 1980s that their addictive potential was recognized; a study of this group of substances in 2008 nevertheless foretold that "they will still be prescribed for many years to come."

**Synonyms:** tranks, benzos, vals; rosh and roofies for rohypnol.

**Sleepless:** "My wife doesn't let me take Valium," said benzodiazepine's inventor Leo Sternbach to *The New Yorker*.

## Cannabis genus of the hemp plant

**Active ingredient:**

Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)

**Form of consumption:** usually smoked, mixed with tobacco in cigarettes, as blunts (larger) or joints (smaller), or with special hashish pipes. The effect occurs here almost immediately, delayed when cannabis drinks, yogurt, and baked cookies are consumed.

**Effect:** accentuates existing positive or negative moods; makes consumers considerably more upbeat. Feelings of relaxation, inner peace and equilibrium; often reduced drive. Cheerfulness and heightened social communicativeness are also observed.

**Prevalence:** almost 25 percent of all Europeans aged between 15 and 64 have

consumed cannabis at least once in their lives. 6.8 percent of the same age group have consumed it within the past twelve months – or one out of three people have experimented with cannabis.

**Risks:** restricted physical and mental capacity, coupled with self-overestimation; inability to drive. If consumed heavily and regularly: psychological dependency, passivity.

**Origins and history:** its home is probably the Middle East and Central Asia. Used in folk medicine (to reduce the pain of neuralgia, migraine, and seizure disorders), but also in all cultural circles as an intoxicant. First mentioned in 2700 BC in a Chinese book of medicines. Its was used as a remedy with euphorizing effect that began in 19th century Europe.

**Synonyms:** dope, ganja, bud, grass, weed, hash, pot, piece, shit, spliff.

**Queen of Pot:** physicians prescribed cannabis for Queen Victoria (1819–1901) to treat period pains.

## Cocaine crystal-like powder made from the leaves of the coca bush

**Active ingredient:** Cocaine

**Form of consumption:** sniffed, intravenously injected, and smoked (crack).

**Effect:** stimulates the central nervous system strongly by suppressing the re-uptake of noradrenaline, dopamine, and serotonin in synaptic vesicles. Immediately effective, euphorogenic, stress-reducing. Loss of inhibition coupled with increased energy and creativity.

**Prevalence:** around 4.6 percent of all Europeans aged between 15 and 64 have consumed cocaine at least once in their lives. 1.2 percent of the same age group have consumed cocaine during the past twelve months – or one out of four people have experimented with cocaine.

**Risks:** rapid psychological dependency, all the way to 'cocaine psychosis'; impurities in filler substances increase the risk of side-effects.

**Origins and history:** the coca bush has been cultivated in South America for a good 5,000 years. Its leaves may only have been used for ritual activities initially. When impoverishment set in with the Spanish conquest, large sections of the population used the plant to stave off hunger and cold, and to increase their productivity. The active ingredient was isolated around 1860 and used initially as a local anesthetic and anti-depressant. Cocaine epidemic among artists and intellectuals in the 1920s; renaissance in the 1970s and since the early 1990s as a 'performance drug'.

**Synonyms:** coke, snow, blow; crack and rocks (for crack).

**Descent:** "If you wanna get down, down on the ground, Cocaine" – JJ Cale (1976).

## Crack cocaine hydrochloride mixed with alkalis → Cocaine

is smoked. First appeared in 1983/84 on the West Coast of the USA.

## 'Designer Drugs'

### Amphetamines ('speed') and Methamphetamine ('ecstasy')

**Active ingredients:** these structurally similar and synthetically produced designer drugs belong to the substance category of beta-phenylalkylamines (beta-phenethylamines).

**Form of consumption:** usually swallowed, more seldom sniffed, taken intravenously, or even smoked (methamphetamine).

**Effect:** as an analeptic it provides a lift and produces wakefulness, vitality, and self-confidence; methamphetamines often have a much stronger effect than amphetamines.

**Prevalence, amphetamines:** around 3.8 percent of all Europeans aged between 15 and 64 have consumed amphetamines at least once in their lives. 0.6 percent of the same age group consumed amphetamines in the last twelve months – or one out of six people have experimented with amphetamines.

**Prevalence, ecstasy:** around

3.4 percent of all Europeans aged between 15 and 64 have consumed ecstasy at least once in their lives. 0.6 percent of the same age group consumed ecstasy in the last twelve months – or one out of six people have experimented with ecstasy.

**Risks:** overdose and side-effects, especially in the case of impure and intravenously administered drugs; hallucinations, psychological dependency, collapse, dehydration.

**Origins and history:** the colloquial expressions 'designer drug' and, in Germany, 'Weckamine' (which means 'wake-amines') describe on the one hand the intentional synthesis of these substances in the laboratory, and on the other hand their effect. In 1887 the Romanian chemist Lazăr Edeleanu synthesized amphetamine in Berlin, which was used from 1933 onwards as Benzedrine to treat colds. But its stimulant side-effects soon came to the fore – in environments such as the military, which since World War II used amphetamines to increase performance, and also in sport. A new dimension of misuse began in the 1960s with injected amphetamines, which continues to this day; the 'party drug' is now consumed in various forms. The development of methamphetamines occurred in parallel: synthesized for the first time in 1893 in Japan, they became commonplace in almost every army in the Second World War thanks to their stimulant effects – in Germany under the name Pervitin, which was patented in 1937. As with MDMA (ecstasy), which was first synthesized in 1912, these uses eclipsed potential medical applications in the treatment of colds and the stimulation of appetite. Used for doping, ecstasy in particular has become the unhappy star of the music scene since the mid-1960s.

**Synonyms, amphetamines:** speed, pep, white, crank, uppers.

**Synonyms, methamphetamines:** ice, meth, crystal, glass, Tina; for ecstasy: E, Adam, XTC, beans, X, MDMA, love drug.

**Nobel plea:** "The service is tight ... today I am writing primarily about Pervitin. ... Yours, Hein," telegraphed Nobel Prize for Literature winner (in 1972) Heinrich Böll from Poland on November 9, 1939 to his parents in Cologne.

**Diazepam** → **Benzodiazepines**  
**Indispensable:** the WHO includes it in its list of 'Essential Medicines' that belong to the minimum equipment for basic medical care.

**Ecstasy** → 'Designer Drugs'

**Hashish resin from the blossoms of the female hemp plant**  
**Active ingredient:** tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), levels between five and 20 percent depending on origin.

→ Cannabis

**Pothead in Berlin:**

"From now on a joint must always be burning on German soil!" declared actor and cabaret artist Wolfgang Neuss (1983).

**Heroin** → **Opioids**

**Synonyms:** H, stuff, junk, mud, tar, skag, brown sugar, smack, China white, chiva, dragon.

**À la mode:** in 1986 *The Sunday Times* coined the term 'Heroin Chic' to describe heroin consumer culture, especially very thin, pale models.

**Ketamines**

**Active ingredient:** a so-called 'dissociative anesthetic' closely related to hallucinogens (phencyclidine derivative).

**Form of consumption:** drunk in a watery solution or sniffed as a powder (Ketanest, Ketaset, Ketalar); more rarely intravenously injected.

**Effect:** produces a kind of cataleptic state in which the consumer sees himself as disconnected from his surroundings and body ('K Land'), and from time ('K Hole'). Bizarre, sometimes terrifying dreams, visual and auditive hallucinations.

**Prevalence:** incomplete, inconsistently collected data estimates usage at around

2 to 4 percent among young adults (15–34 years) in selected EU countries.

**Risks:** collapse if overdosed, psychoses if consumed regularly, lasting state of fear even after small doses – given genetic disposition.

**Origins and history:** developed as a fast-acting anesthetic from 1962 in the USA, where it was approved in 1970 then used immediately, including in the Vietnam War; non-medical consumption initially among 'psychonauts', today as a 'club drug' at raves, etc.

**Synonyms:** Special K, Vitamin K, jet, super acid, Kit Kat, bump.

**Paradise:** "If captains of industry, leaders of nations could partake of this love medicine the whole planet might be converted into the Garden Of Eden." Psychonaut Marcia Moore in *Journeys Into the Bright World* (1978).

**Marijuana dried, shredded pieces of the female hemp plant**

**Active ingredient:** tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), levels between 1 and 7 percent depending on origin; Dutch greenhouse strains (skunk, sinsemilla, Nederwiet) up to 22 percent.

→ Cannabis

**Beat poetry:** "I could do these things endlessly on grass," wrote Jack Kerouac to his friend Allen Ginsberg.

**Methadone**

**Active ingredient:** synthetic → Opioids

**Form of consumption:** in powder or tablet form, as drops or syrup; taken orally when used legally as part of substitution therapy for heroin addicts; illegal usage both oral and intravenous.

**Effect:** similar to other opioids, but weaker and more delayed.

**Prevalence:** lifetime prevalence estimated at 0.2 percent.

**Risks:** dependency, death following massive overdose.

**Origins and history:** first synthesized in 1939 by I.G. Farben as 'Va 10820', and produced initially in small quantities from 1942 onwards as a painkiller under the name 'Amidon', before being re-

named 'methadone' in the USA in 1947. Used in the USA from the late 1940s onwards to compensate for the withdrawal symptoms suffered by patients addicted to heroin; in Germany from 1950 onwards (as 'Polamidon'). First experimental methadone program in Germany between 1973 and 1975 in Hanover. Substitution programs using methadone were established in Germany from around 1990 onwards following positive research work there.

**Synonyms:** dolly, doll, red rock.

**Curative:** the idea that methadone (Amidon) entered the market as 'Adolphine' prior to 1945 proved to be an urban legend spread in New York in the 1970s to discredit methadone substitution therapy by associating it with the Nazi regime.

**Opioids (active in drugs such as morphine, opium, heroin, codeine, etc.)**

**Active ingredients:** naturally occurring or synthesized substances which stimulate what are known as the opioid or  $\mu$ -receptors in the brain and spinal chord.

**Form of consumption:** smoked, eaten, sniffed, or intravenously injected.

**Effect:** induces states ranging from exuberant happiness (heroin) to fantasies and (erotic) hallucinations.

**Prevalence:** the number of 'problematic opioid consumers' in Europe is estimated at 1.4 million. Three percent of all drug-induced deaths among Europeans aged between 15 and 30 are connected to opioids.

**Risks:** heavy dependency, death if overdosed, severe withdrawal symptoms ('turkey') – especially after heroin.

**Origins and history:** opioids emerged in what is now Turkey more than 8,000 years ago as opium, which was garnered from the opium poppy. Juice obtained from scored, unripe poppy seed capsules was made into pills and used as a medicine to alleviate pain. Opium has only been smoked since the discovery of America by the Europeans, who brought tobacco and

pipes back home with them. It found its way to China via contemporary Indonesia in the 17th century. In Europe, opium was used as an analgesic mainly from the 18th century onwards. Morphine, the most important main alkaloid, was isolated from opium in 1804; heroin, which has an even greater potential for addiction, was synthesized in 1898. During the early decades of the 20th century the medicinal use of opioids, especially heroin, shifted to misuse as an illegal drug (pre)produced mainly in the 'Golden Triangle' of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, as well as Afghanistan. In Germany opioids are the primary drug involved in half of all drug therapy inquiries.

**Piercing damage:** "I've seen the needle / And the damage done" – Neil Young singing about the demise of a heroin-addicted guitarist on the album *Harvest* (1972).

**Opium**

**Active ingredient:** morphine → Opioids

**By the book:** "Whoever wishes to smoke opium must purchase a permit personally from the responsible Opium Officer. The fee for this permit shall be one dollar a month, and must be paid quarterly in advance" – Paragraph 5 of the 'Ordinance on Opium' issued by Imperial Governor Meyer-Waldeck in Tsingtao, 1912.

**Speedball blend of cocaine with morphine or heroin**

**Pushing the deadline:** the physician Lord Dawson of Penn injected a fatally ill British King George V with a deadly mixture of cocaine and morphine on January 20, 1936 at around five minutes to midnight, "so that the announcement of the King's death could be published in the morning edition of the newspapers..."

**Valium** → **Benzodiazepines**

**Kids on your nerves:** "And though she's not really ill / There's a little yellow pill" (*Mother's Little Helper*, The Rolling Stones, 1965).

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