

This leaflet includes useful scientific information on how the use of addictive substances – on a systematic or a recreational basis – may **affect** the brain, psychological and bodily functions and other aspects of drug users’ everyday life. The **risks** associated with drug use are also outlined.

Substances that cause dependence are called **addictive substances**. Physical and psychological addiction is defined as the need to repetitively make use of an addictive substance.

When introduced into the body, addictive substances act upon the central nervous system, affecting cognitive and emotional mental functions.

Addictive substances are divided into two groups: **legal** substances such as alcohol and tobacco, and **illegal** ones such as cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy and others which you can find information on in this leaflet.

#### CANNABIS

Cannabis is a plant that contains some 400 active ingredients. The main mind- altering (psychoactive) ingredient in cannabis is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

Smoking cannabis produces a series of physical and psychological effects. Some immediate physical effects of cannabis include a faster heartbeat and pulse rate. Reflexes may slow down or become overstimulated. The drug can impair cognition, reduce the ability to perform tasks that require concentration, shorten the attention span, alter the sense of time and reduce the ability to learn. The use of cannabis causes dilation of the vessels in the conjunctiva of the eye (bloodshot eyes), dry mouth, increased appetite and sleepiness.

A situation described as acute cannabis poisoning may also occur, with psychological and physical effects such as trembling, damage to the respiratory system, myocardial contractions, nausea, loss of consciousness, panic attacks, increased anxiety and sometimes hallucinations. Regular long-term cannabis users become passive and lose their interest in activities other than smoking. They are trapped in a vicious circle, in which drug use leads to passivity, boredom and indifference, urging the individual to use drugs again.

Although often cannabis dependence is underestimated, regular cannabis use may gradually lead to addiction. Smoking cannabis can become a habit and may even lead to obsessive thoughts as regards smoking cannabis.

Regular cannabis users may also develop chronic bronchitis, depression or irritability.

Among people who are susceptible to mental illness, cannabis may be a trigger for other serious psychiatric disorders (psychosis, paranoia, etc.).

Combining cannabis with alcohol further increases risk by decreasing complex psychomotor coordination skills, making activities, such as driving a car, more dangerous.

#### ECSTASY

Ecstasy is a pill mainly containing a substance named amphetamine, but ecstasy pills have been often found to also contain other dangerous active substances.

Once the pill is swallowed, its effects are almost immediate: hyperactivity, tension and loss of self-control. Other effects include pupil dilation, grinding and clenching of teeth, loss of appetite, dry mouth, heart palpitations and sweaty palms, and even dangerous overheating and dehydration. Some days after the consumption of ecstasy, users may suffer from insomnia, temporary depression, headaches and muscle pains.

Unpredictable effects are a typical characteristic of ecstasy tablets that can put the users’ lives at stake.

According to the results of a number of scientific studies, the brain of former ecstasy users was damaged and malfunctioning, even when the pills were taken on a recreational basis.

Mixing ecstasy with alcohol and other drugs increases the drug’s toxicity and, thus, the risk of adverse reactions.

People with certain disorders such as asthma, heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes, epilepsy or mental disorders are at greater risk.

#### COCAINE-CRACK COCAINE

Cocaine is a powerful stimulant that directly affects the central nervous system. Its repeated use leads rapidly to addiction. It is often adulterated with other substances such as anesthetics, baking soda, amphetamines, etc.

The immediate physical effects of cocaine include increased alertness and energy levels (hypervigilance). The ability for critical

thinking decreases, while speech becomes faster, less relevant and eventually incoherent. Mood swings have also been reported. Many users experience the delusion of an increased sense of confidence and have the belief that they possess great mental and physical capacities. However, the euphoria soon disappears, leaving the user with a sense of dysphoria and as a result, a strong craving to use cocaine again and again. When cocaine use is interrupted, withdrawal symptoms set in and these include anxiety, deep depression, drowsiness and inertia.

Cocaine intoxication may occur after cocaine use. Its symptoms include panic attacks, elevated heart rate and blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, vomiting, fits, heart attacks and sometimes even death. Visual and auditory delusions and hallucinations have also been reported.

Cocaine use is especially hazardous for people suffering from asthma, heart disease, epilepsy, kidney or liver disease, diabetes or mental disorders. When mixed with alcohol, cocaine’s toxicity increases to even more dangerous levels.

#### HEROIN

Heroin is a strong opiate drug, in powder form. It causes mood swings (from initial euphoria to apathy and dysphoria), respiratory problems, drowsiness and tardiness, and temporally impairs perception, concentration and memory, thought and speech.

Repeated heroin use produces tolerance and a strong physical and psychological dependence. Heroin withdrawal symptoms are mainly physical and can be extremely intense and persistent. Intravenous users are a high risk group for Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS.

Heroin use has negative consequences on the users’ social life and psychological state, and it often leads to delinquent behaviour.

Heroin overdose can cause a respiratory depression that can lead to a coma, cardiac collapse and, subsequently, to death.

#### HALLUCINOGENS

Hallucinogens are a diverse group of substances that include drugs such as LSD, magic mushrooms, the strongest types of cannabis (skunk) and even ecstasy. Hallucinogens cause profound distortions in perception, thought processes and emotions.

Their effects are felt within 20-30 minutes, causing pupil dilation, increased energy levels, tachycardia (heart palpitation), tremors and increased energy levels, mood swings, delusions, and a sense of confused or unclear boundaries (between oneself, others and the outside world).

There is also a commonly reported possibility of unpleasant experiences (known as “bad trips”) and persistent distorted perceptions which recur following use (“flashbacks”), hallucinations, anxiety, mania and depression.

#### INHALANTS

Inhalant use refers to the intentional breathing of gas or vapours (e.g. lighter fuel vapours) with the purpose of reaching a high. The use of inhalants such as chemical solvents has an immediate toxic effect on the liver, the kidneys, the heart and lungs. Other inhalant substances may cause brain damage, lethargy, confusion, aggressive behaviour, weakness, hyperactivity, reduced sense of judgment, dizziness, tremors, distorted vision and disordered speech, muscular weakness, and may even lead to a coma.

#### NEW SYNTHETIC DRUGS MEPHEDRONE

Mephedrone (Mephedrone - 4-methylmethcathinone) is a synthetic drug based on cathinone, and it is used as an alternative to illicit substances such as amphetamines, cocaine or ecstasy. Mephedrone is usually sold as a crystalline powder, but it has also been found in pill form.

Mephedrone is advertised online as “bath salts” and “fertiliser”. The consequences of its use include a range of psychological and behavioural effects such as euphoria, general arousal, behavioural changes, etc. Even small doses can endanger a user’s health.

#### METHAMPHETAMINE

Methamphetamine or Crystal Meth Methamphetamine has much in common with amphetamine in terms of its chemical structure, but its effect on the central nervous system is greater. Methamphetamine appears on the market as a white or yellow crystalline powder; its taste is bitter and it is odourless. The effects of methamphetamine vary according to the way it is ingested. Short-term effects of its use include heightened vigilance, dryness of the oral cavity, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, irritability, confusion, tremor, muscle spasms, anxiety, paranoia, brain

stroke, or even death. Long-term use results in extreme paranoia, hallucinations and violent behaviour.

#### “SPICE”-TYPE PRODUCTS AND SIMILAR SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS

Synthetic cannabinoids, also known as “legal highs”, are found in products which consist of herbal mixtures, but in many cases these are chemically laced with synthetic cannabinoids. These substances are similar to tetrahydrocannabinol (THC, the active ingredient in cannabis), but their impact on human brain receptors is much stronger. If these synthetic substances are mixed with tobacco and smoked, their effect appears to be similar to cannabis.

According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, some possible consequences of the use of synthetic cannabinoids include general arousal, muscle spasms, hypertension, and psychiatric complications (e.g. psychosis). The toxicity of substances contained in synthetic cannabinoid mixtures is uncertain and therefore, it is difficult to offer a reliable estimate of their health consequences.

#### DRUGS HELPLINES

**Drug Law Enforcement Unit, Cyprus Police Force (D.L.E.U.)**  
Helpline Telephone Number: 1498

«**PERSEAS**» **Counselling Centre for Adolescence and Families**  
Helpline Telephone Number: 1456

**Youth Board of Cyprus,**  
Helpline Telephone Number: 1410

«**THEMEA**» **Therapeutic Unit for Addicted Persons (ALCOHOL)**  
Tel.: 22458518/22457060

**PREVENTION SERVICES Public Services**

**Drug Law Enforcement Unit - Prevention Office, Cyprus Police**  
Tel.: 22607100, Fax: 22607130

**Coordinating Health and Citizenship Committee, Ministry of Education and Culture**  
Tel.: 22800992

**Educational Psychology Service** Tel.: 22800740

“**MIKRI ARKTOS**” **Primary Drugs Abuse, Prevention Center**  
Tel.: 25443079

“**PROTASI**” **Programme – Youth Board of Cyprus Counseling Services**  
Tel.: 99973289

**Non-Governmental Bodies / Services**

**KENTHEA (Head Office)**  
Tel.: 22385588

**INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES Public Services**

“**PERSEAS**” **Adolences and Family Counseling Centre,** Tel.: 22464292

“**PROMITHEUS**” **Drugs Prevention and Counseling Centre for Adolescents and Families**  
Tel.: 25305079, 25305110

“**MULTIFUNCTIONAL CENTER**”, Nicosia  
Tel.: 22465616

“**ORIZONTAS**” **Counselling Programme**  
Tel.: 25305333

“**ANOSI**” **Detoxification Unit** Tel.: 25305011

“**THEMEA**” (ALCOHOL) Tel.: 22457060

**Substitution Programme “Gefyra” Nicosia,** Tel.: 22402113  
“**Sosivio**” **Limassol,** Tel.: 25305111

**First Aid Centre** 199 / 112

**Non-Governmental Bodies / Associations**

“**AYIA SKEPI**” **Counseling Station Nicosia,** Tel.: 22347720

“**AYIA SKEPI**” **Treatment Programme Therapeutic Community Nicosia** Tel.: 22634511

“**KENTHEA**” **Prevention Division**  
Tel.: 22385588

“**TOLMI**” **Open Therapeutic Community for Addicted Persons**  
**Larnaca,** Tel.: 24532208 / 99455874  
**Paphos,** Tel.: 26941919

“**APOFASIZO**” **Counselling Station**  
Tel.: 70005537