

## Drugs

Some legal professionals and students can feel that drugs help them get through the difficult times. A 2015 survey by Legal Cheek found that more than a quarter of practising lawyers take recreational drugs, with a high proportion taking cocaine, ecstasy/MDMA or ketamine. Apart from the dangers drugs can pose to your health and personal life, the implications for your career can be serious.

However drug use is justified, and whatever your personal views on drugs, the fact remains that recreational drugs are illegal. Neither the police nor your professional body will take your views into account, and your position of trust within the community means that local and even national papers may consider your drug use a matter of public interest.

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### AM I ADDICTED?

- ▶ Do you find you need to take more and more of the drug to have the same effect?
- ▶ Do you find yourself becoming preoccupied with the drug - when you will next take it, how it will feel, how much you will take?
- ▶ Do you no longer have the interest or enthusiasm for things you once enjoyed?
- ▶ Do you continue to use the drug even though it is causing problems in your life and relationships?
- ▶ Have you tried to give up using the drug, but have not been able to succeed in the long term?
- ▶ Do you have withdrawal symptoms or unpleasant feelings when you have been off the drug for a while?

If you answer yes to two or more of these questions could indicate that you are drug dependent. And, generally speaking, if you suspect that you are addicted, you probably are, and you need help. Accepting you have a problem will be complicated by the fact that taking drugs remains socially unacceptable. However, support for those wanting to beat any addiction is readily available.

## TREATING DRUG DEPENDENCY

Drug addiction is a medical issue, and your first port of call should be your GP. Treatment involves dealing with both the physical and psychological effects, and can be a very stressful time. You will need to confront and resolve your underlying problems and learn to cope without a drug that was once central to your life. Accessing support from trusted family, friends and colleagues at this time is vital.

Depending on the type of drug, the degree of your addiction and your attitude, outpatient treatment or even voluntary attendance at a self-help group run by an organisation such as Narcotics Anonymous can be effective. Inpatient treatment normally lasts about five to six weeks, and is available on the NHS, although there is often a long waiting list. It is possible to be admitted to a centre privately but this can be expensive.

On admission to a centre, if you are physically dependent on a drug, you will first need to undergo detoxification, which involves replacing the drug with a prescription medicine and gradually reducing the dose. This may take around two weeks, and is usually followed by an intensive programme of group work and individual counselling. This encourages you to recognise the issues that led you to become dependent, and to develop your self-esteem and positive attitudes. Therapists at both outpatient and inpatient centres have often been treated for drug dependency themselves, so they can empathise and act as convincing role models.

## PRESCRIPTION AND OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUGS

Almost all drugs are potentially addictive. Whenever you are prescribed a medicine, ask your doctor whether it is addictive, whether it has side effects or contraindications, whether it can be taken with medication you already take, how long you will need to take it for, and whether there are any alternative treatments. If you find yourself regularly purchasing over-the-counter medication you should consider whether you are feeding an addiction.

### Painkillers

Addiction to legal painkillers, such as codeine, fentanyl and co-codamol has become common, with more people now seeking help for this than for heroin addiction. Patients experiencing chronic, long-term pain may find that they need to take more and more of a prescribed or over-the-counter painkiller to achieve relief. They can soon find that, in addition to their pain, they experience withdrawal symptoms if they do not keep a baseline of the drug in their system. If this is a problem for you, seek help from your GP immediately, who will support you in controlled withdrawal from the drug.

### Benzodiazepines

Addiction to benzodiazepines ('benzos') remains a significant problem. These drugs are highly effective in treating acute anxiety but cause serious withdrawal symptoms when people try to stop taking them, including sleeplessness and intense anxiety. With long-term use benzos have side effects, particularly the feeling of being in a daze or emotionally anaesthetised. Some brand names of benzodiazepines to look out for are Valium (diazepam), Librium (chlordiazepoxide), Mogadon (nitrazepam), Ativan (lorazepam), Oxazepam, Loprazolam and Temazepam. Withdrawal from benzos requires careful management.

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