A silhouette of a person wearing a cap and glasses, leaning forward on a treadmill in a gym setting. The background is a dimly lit room with blue lighting.

ALCOHOL, SMOKING AND ILLICIT DRUGS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW IF YOU HAVE DIABETES

➤ WHY IS THIS LEAFLET FOR YOU?

The purpose of this leaflet is to inform you about the effects that alcohol, nicotine and illicit drugs can have on you, your diabetes, and your short and long term physical and mental health. Many of these substances are illegal and can lead to addiction and overdose. It includes information about:

- “Uppers”
- “Downers”
- Hallucinogens
- How these substances affect your diabetes
- Keeping safe

This leaflet **does not** recommend smoking or drinking alcohol over the advised safe daily limit, **neither does it recommend** taking illicit drugs as they are illegal and can seriously damage your health. However, if you do use them, please find below some advice to keep you safe.

- ⚠ Carry hypo treatment with you at all times
- ⚠ Know what you are taking
- ⚠ Don't take illicit drugs when you are alone
- ⚠ Be in a safe place
- ⚠ Do not stop taking your insulin
- ⚠ Check your blood glucose before and after. If you are low, treat with glucose
- ⚠ Drink plenty of water
- ⚠ Eat a carbohydrate-rich meal after you "come down"
- ⚠ Carry ID so people know you have diabetes
- ⚠ Seek professional help if you feel you cannot stop using any of the substances discussed in this leaflet



➤ WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

When we talk about substances, we are not just talking about illicit drugs as many of these substances are legally available. They can have different effects on the body: some can stimulate you, some can depress you and some can alter your senses. As someone with diabetes, you need to take these effects into consideration. Below is a list of substances. Important information about their effects are described in this booklet.

Legally available:

Alcohol

Caffeine (e.g. tea and coffee)

Glues and solvents

Insulin

Nicotine (tobacco)

Nitrous oxide (laughing gas)

Prescription drugs (e.g. diazepam)

Illegal to use:

Alkyl-nitrate (poppers)

Amphetamines (speed)

Anabolic steroids

Cannabis (marijuana)

Cocaine

Crack cocaine

Ecstasy (MDMA)

Ketamine

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD)

Mephedrone (meow meow)

Methamphetamine (crystal meth)

New psychoactive substances such as Spice (previously known as "legal highs")

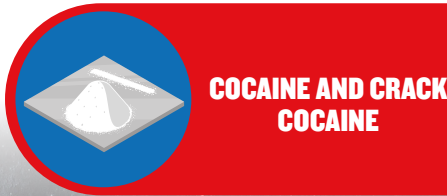
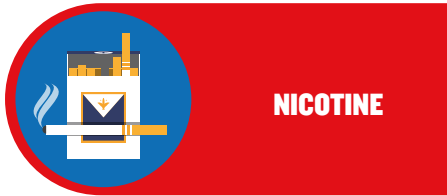
Synthetic cannabinoids

➤ **THERE ARE 3 TYPES OF SUBSTANCES COMMONLY MISUSED: UPPERS, DOWNERS AND HALLUCINOGENS**

Uppers - What do they do?

These are stimulants, speeding up your heart rate and body temperature, and increasing your blood pressure. They can cause anxiety and depression and make you feel paranoid. They also affect the way you think and talk.

Examples:

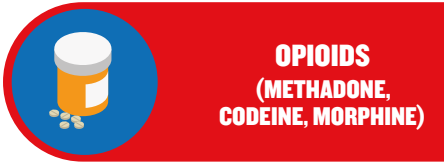


> COMMONLY USED SUBSTANCES

Downers - What do they do?

They slow everything down: your pulse, breathing, concentration and have a depressant effect.

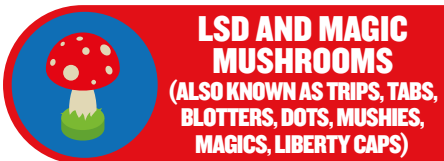
Examples:



Hallucinogens - What do they do?

These alter the way you see, hear, think and feel. Solvents have unpredictable effects, and can damage your brain, liver, kidneys and heart. They can also increase appetite, cause nosebleeds and vomiting.

Examples:



➤ HOW MAY THESE SUBSTANCES AFFECT YOUR DIABETES?

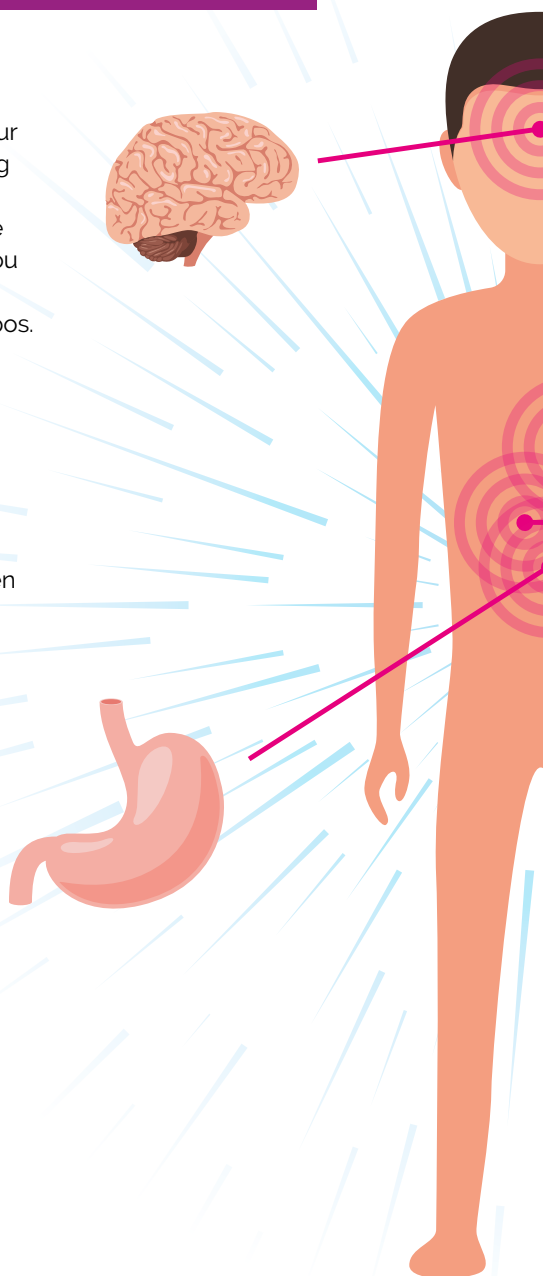
Uppers: These substances can make the body break down carbohydrates faster, making you at risk of hypos. As they alter your mental processes, you may miss the warning symptoms of a hypo. They can cause a loss of appetite so you eat less and again run the risk of having a hypo. They can also make you believe you can carry on prolonged activity without eating again leading to possible hypos.

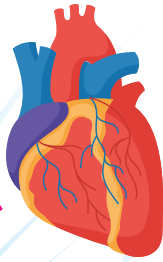
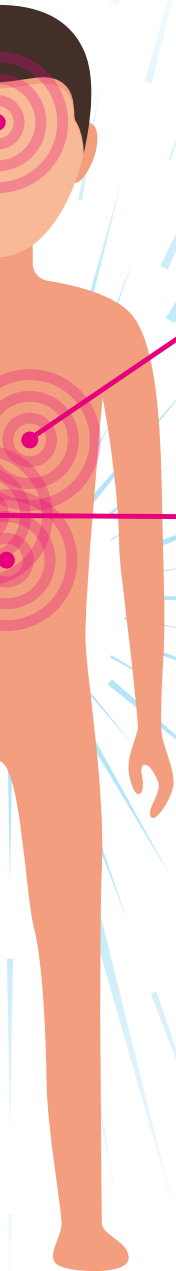
They can make you anxious, depressed and paranoid which may have an effect on how you manage your diabetes.

Hallucinogens: These can cause confusion, problems with concentration and memory loss so you may not be sure if you have eaten or taken your insulin. You may have trouble remembering how to give your insulin or test your blood glucose. They can impair glucose tolerance and increase appetite so could cause blood glucose levels to rise

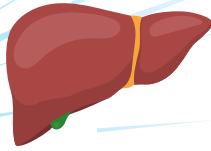
Downers: These can cause short-term memory problems and make it difficult to concentrate so you may forget to take your insulin or diabetes medication, or take the wrong dose leading to a hypo or hyperglycaemia.

Opioids increase the concentration of certain hormones which can make your blood glucose run high. Some downers can also give you the "munchies", making you hungry and over-eat, while some can alter your perception.





Smoking: Diabetes can cause damage to blood vessels throughout the body. Smoking does the same. Diabetes and smoking more than doubles your risk of damage, which increases the chance of having a heart attack, stroke, amputation and blindness. Smoking can make you more resistant to insulin so you may need more insulin than someone who doesn't smoke.



Alcohol: Hinders the liver from releasing glucose so increases your risk of having a hypo if you use insulin or certain types of diabetes tablets. Each drink of alcohol you have can take the liver up to two hours to break down. The onset of hypos may be delayed for up to 24 hours after you have been drinking. The signs and symptoms of alcohol intoxication and hypos are very similar so your hypo may not be recognised and treated. Alcohol worsens the symptoms of existing diabetes nerve damage, so increasing pain.

> USEFUL RESOURCES:

Diabetes UK:

www.diabetes.org.uk ☎ 0345 123 2399

Drugs advice (FRANK):

supportline.org.uk ☎ 0300 123 6600

Alcohol concern:

www.drinkaware.co.uk ☎ 0203 907 8480

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH):

www.ash.org.uk ☎ 0207 404 0242



™ Trend Diabetes Limited. Content to be reviewed June 2024