



# How Drugs and Alcohol Affect Your Body and Brain

KS3 CITIZENSHIP

Ages 11-14 ⌚ 4 min read

## What Are Drugs and Alcohol?

**Drugs** and **alcohol** are **substances** that change how your brain and body work. Some are legal (like alcohol for adults), but they all affect your **nervous system** — the part of your body that controls thinking, feelings, and movement. Your brain is still developing until you're around **25 years old**, which makes young people especially at risk.

## How Do They Affect Your Brain?

When you use drugs or alcohol, they travel through your **bloodstream** and reach your brain. They change how **chemicals** in your brain send messages. This is why people feel different — happier, sleepy, or confused — but the effects are temporary and come with serious risks.

Think of it like: Your brain is a control centre with thousands of workers sending messages. Drugs are like people shouting confusing orders, making the workers lose their way and make mistakes.

## Short-Term Risks

Using drugs or alcohol can cause **immediate dangers**. You might feel dizzy, lose balance, make poor decisions, or struggle to concentrate. This can lead to **accidents** like falls, injuries, or dangerous situations. Your **reflexes** slow down, which is why drunk driving is so dangerous — you can't react fast enough to stop.

## Long-Term Effects

**Regular use** causes serious problems. Your brain can become **dependent** on the substance, meaning you feel like you need it to feel normal. This is called **addiction**. You might struggle in school, lose friendships, or develop **mental health problems** like anxiety or depression. Your lungs, liver, and heart can be permanently damaged.

Heavy alcohol use can actually kill **brain cells** and stop your brain from developing properly.

Think of it like: If you keep bending a paperclip the same way, eventually it breaks and never works the same again. Your body can work similarly with repeated damage.

## Why Do People Use Them?

People try drugs and alcohol for many reasons — **peer pressure**, stress, curiosity, or trying to fit in. But just because others do it doesn't make it safe. Many people feel stuck because **addiction** changes their brain chemistry, making it harder to stop.

## The Reality

**Drug and alcohol abuse** ruins lives. It causes health problems, breaks families apart, affects school and work, and can lead to serious **crime**. Getting help early is crucial. If you or someone you know is struggling, **talk to a trusted adult** — a parent, teacher, counsellor, or doctor.