

Polydrug Abuse Encyclopedia Article

Polydrug Abuse

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Polydrug Abuse

This term refers to the common observation that individuals who are considered drug abusers often abuse more than one type of drug. Almost all drug abusers smoke NICOTINE cigarettes and a large proportion consume alcoholic beverages, but many of them do not consider the co-occurrence of these two forms of drug use as an instance of polydrug abuse.

There are several types of polydrug abusers. They include those who abuse two or more substances but with a definite preference for one; only when they are not able to get supplies of their preferred drug do they abuse other types of drugs. These other types of drugs may either be from the same pharmacological class (e.g., HEROIN abusers may abuse other NARCOTICS as CODEINE or Demerol) or from different pharmacological classes (e.g., STIMULANT abusers—such as COCAINE abusers—may also use heroin, a narcotic). Some poly-drug abusers do not necessarily have a favorite drug but instead may select different drugs for consumption at different times (e.g., stimulants in the morning, SEDATIVES at night) or under different conditions.

Polydrug abuse can also refer to the consumption of a drug to counteract an unpleasant effect produced by another drug or by withdrawal from another drug. For example, individuals who take enough stimulants to become highly agitated and aroused may take a tranquilizer to counteract the unpleasant side effects. Finally, polydrug abuse can refer to the consumption of different drugs simultaneously (e.g., speedballs). The assumption is that the different drugs in combination constitute more than the sum of their individual parts, producing a unique, highly reinforcing effect.

See Also

Barbiturates: Complications; Drug Abuse Warning Network; Drug Interactions and Alcohol; Prescription Drug Abuse; Sedatives; Adverse Consequences of Chronic Use)