

Being drug wise

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We have all heard of the war on drugs. It is time to get clued up on the subject if we are going to be part of the fight to protect ourselves and our loved ones from drug abuse. We need to know just what we are facing. The war on drugs needs to be fought with knowledge and where better than the Internet to acquire that knowledge. Drugs have found their way into every echelon of society, from the poorest of the poor; to the wealthiest household. Drug abuse takes many forms - be it glue sniffing, snorting cocaine, mainlining heroin, popping the odd tab of ecstasy, spacing out on dagga, or even abusing over-the-counter prescription medication.

There is a huge amount of information available on the Internet. Read about the various drugs available, the effects that they have on the user; how to identify the signs of drug addiction, how to obtain help and so much more. Many organisations have web sites, to provide education on drug abuse at all levels - adults and children. There are links to rehabilitation centres and outreach programmes. It is just a case of sifting through the information to find the information that will best meet your needs.

Recognising the signs of drug addiction

Would you be able to recognise the signs of drug abuse if you came across it? Say for instance your colleague at work regularly arrives appearing hung-over; but by mid-morning has become the life and soul of the office. Each time he/she makes a visit to the bathroom, he/she seems to return perked up. Or say your teenage son has become reclusive and uncommunicative. He

seems to have lost interest in everything. He skips classes and his schoolwork has taken a nosedive. Money, jewellery and valuable household items start disappearing. It is time to consider that drugs may be involved.

Perhaps the first signs that one might notice, is a change in the drug user's behaviour and appearance. The quality of the work they produce may deteriorate. From being a straight A student, involved in sport or other extra-curricular activities, the drug user might become reclusive and secretive.

The Kwazulu-Natal Department of Health website, www.kznhealth.gov.za/drugabuse.htm, provides a quick and easy reference chart to assist one to identify the signs of drug abuse. In simple point-format, it describes what to look out for and gives a short description of various drugs and their effects. I am pleased to see that they include alcohol and nicotine in the list of drugs most commonly abused.

Educating children, teenagers and parents

If one wants to join in the fight against drugs, then it is important to equip oneself with as much knowledge as possible about the whole drug culture. Some sites provide an overview of the drugs in use, while others

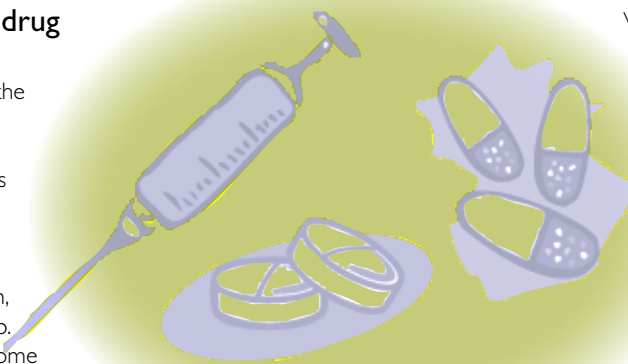
have more in-depth information. I found the following sites to be really good in explaining drug addiction and its effects on young children and teenagers.

http://kidshealth.org/kid/grow/drugs_alcohol_know_drugs.html is particularly useful if one wishes to educate pre-teen children about drug awareness. The information provided is short and simple, without providing too much information for the child to absorb. What struck me is the positive approach that the article takes in answering the question - What can I do to help?

Select the Teen link on <http://kidshealth.org> and select 'Drugs & Alcohol' from the drop down menu to find articles on drugs and addiction suitable for young teenagers. One of the articles on this site explains the difference between physical and psychological addiction. There is also an article on prescription drugs and the abuse of over the counter medicines and prescription drugs. I am sure that you will recall the episode in the television series *Desperate Housewives* when the one mom started taking her children's medication in order to get through the day, and cope with her hyperactive kids - a perfect example of prescription medication abuse.

Teenagers can find answers to their many questions on the site www.health.org. Click on the 'Drugs' link at the top of the screen to obtain a drop down menu, and select a link by drug type. In the 'Search' window, type 'Tips for Teens' and select 'site' to obtain various articles, which are suitable for teenagers. The articles point out the effects that various drugs have on the body. They also answer frequently-asked questions. For example, the following question is answered in the article: **Tips for Teens: The Truth about Club Drugs** - 'If you were in a club and somebody slipped a club drug into your drink, wouldn't you realise it immediately?' The answers are kept short and simple, but provide all the most important information.

The South African Police Services has a very good site, www.saps.gov.za/drugs/, with articles covering all aspects of drugs such as amphetamines, cocaine, LSD and methaqualone (better known as Mandrax). They also publish an article titled **Hints for parents**, which advises parents what they should look out for if they suspect their child is a drug abuser. The article also advises parents how to react should they find out that someone is taking drugs. The emphasis is on positive action rather than a hysterical or threatening approach.



Pick 'n Pay produces pamphlets in their *Talk about* series, which are available in-store, as well as on their web site www.picknpay.co.za. Select 'Envirozone' to access the 'Talk about' link. The articles on drug abuse are very informative. There is a short description of the drug and its effects on the user. There is a particularly interesting article entitled **Drugs and crime**. Drug-related crime takes many forms, from those crimes directly related to the manufacture, distribution and use of drugs, to those crimes influenced by drugs, such as theft, violence and even death due to gang or turf wars.

What is your drug of choice?

If it is more in-depth information on a particular drug or group of drugs that you require, try one of the following web sites.

Dagga and Mandrax

Dagga, known by various names - marijuana, cannabis, weed, grass pot, ganja, hashish, to name a few, is derived from the cannabis sativa plant. Dagga is usually smoked, mixed with tobacco. When mixed with Mandrax, it is known as white pipe. For many Rastafarians the smoking of ganja is regarded as a spiritual act and they have tried to have it legalised.

www.plantzafrica.com/planted/cannabis.htm
www.drugaware.co.za/dagga.html
www.drugaware.co.za/mandrax.html
www.sahealthinfo.org/admodule/cannabis.htm
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rastafarian>

Cocaine

Cocaine is found in the leaves of the South American shrub *Erythroxylon coca*. Cocaine is a central nervous system stimulant, which can bring about a drug-induced state of euphoria. The early Spanish Explorers to South America discovered that the native people chewed the coca leaves to fight off fatigue. In 1886, John Pemberton developed Coca-Cola, which contained both cocaine and caffeine. Cocaine was removed from Coca-Cola in 1906. Crack cocaine was introduced in 1985 and quickly became a major drug problem.

<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/coca.html>
www.cocaine.org
www.thegooddrugsguide.com/articles/c_golden.htm
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coca-Cola>

Heroin and Tik

Heroin is derived from the opium poppy and acts as a central nervous system depressant and an analgesic. The following pharmaceutical products are derived from opium - morphine, methadone and codeine.

The most common manner of using heroin in South Africa is to mix it with dagga and smoke it.

Methamphetamine or Tik as it is commonly known in South Africa, is the most popular drug in the Western Cape and its use is on the increase. The crystal is placed in a light bulb and heated from below and the fumes are inhaled. Tik falls into the stimulant category of narcotics.

www.sahealthinfo.org/admodule/heroin.htm
www.drugtext.org/opiat1.html
www.cia.gov/cia/publications/heroin/flowers_to_heroin.htm
www.heroinabuse.net/
www.dea.org.za

Club drugs

This is the term given to those drugs primarily used by young adults at dance clubs and raves. Often advertised as non-alcoholic functions, this gives parents the impression that they are safe and that their children will be properly supervised. Club drugs include MDMA (Ecstasy), LSD, methamphetamine, and the following three, which are referred to as 'date rape drugs', GHB, Ketamine and Rohypnol.

An organisation called Ravesafe has a web site, which provides a great deal of information about drugs and their effects. They 'neither promote nor condemn the use of drugs' but their philosophy is that they 'believe that if you choose to take drugs, you should be well informed of the risks involved'. They run the Safe House Project, which promotes public safety in clubs and raves. Their web site also provides the contact numbers for RaveSafe, Lifeline, and the Cape Town Drug Counselling Centre.

www.streetdrugs.org
www.streetdrugs.org/clubdrugs.htm
www.erowid.org/chemicals/lsd/lsd_basics.shtml
www.drugaware.co.za
www.ravesafe.org/
www.ecstasy-effects.com/index.htm

Prescription drugs

Do you insist on obtaining and reading the insert pamphlet of the prescription drugs that your doctor prescribes? If you do not understand the information, do you ask the pharmacist to explain? Are you aware that those sleeping pills that you were prescribed can become habit forming? Do you ever take medication prescribed for somebody else? Be aware that addiction to over-the-counter medicines is on the increase and one must be very aware of what one is taking and any side effects.

www.nida.nih.gov/ResearchReports/Prescription/prescription2.html

Getting help

Kicking the drug habit is not easy. There is both a physical and psychological element to drug addiction. Getting clean takes really hard work and commitment. One cannot do it alone, you need help. There are various organisations which can assist the user to beat the drug habit.

- ◆ www.capeinfo.com/Drugs/CTresources.html: This link will provide you with a resource list for drug addiction centres and support groups in the Cape Peninsula.
- ◆ www.healthspas.co.za/theragay-house-index.php: Tharagay House, Mowbray is a care facility specialising in the treatment of drug addiction, alcoholism and eating disorders.
- ◆ www.drugcentre.org.za: The Cape Town Drug Counselling Centre was opened in 1985 under the leadership of the late Adelle Searll and Dr David Rabinowitz. The organisation does sterling work in combating drug abuse. They present Family Workshops for family members of addicts and in 1993 opened a training department.
- ◆ www.steppingstones.co.za: The Stepping Stones Addiction Centre is situated at Kommetjie in the Cape. They offer an intensive treatment programme.
- ◆ www.na.org.za: Narcotics Anonymous is a support group of men and women for whom drugs have become a serious problem. The recovering addicts meet regularly to provide support to one another.
- ◆ www.nrf.ac.za/netpro/association.html: 'The South African Alliance for the Prevention of Substance Abuse (SAAPSA) was established for the purpose of networking together all organisations, government and civil society, concerned with drug and alcohol abuse in South Africa, with a view to optimising cooperation in the prevention and treatment of alcohol and drug abuse in order to improve the quality of life and to promote peace and development for all South Africans.'

I hope that you will find the information on the web sites that I have mentioned as informative and interesting as I did. Perhaps the greatest gift we can give ourselves, and our families, is to arm ourselves with knowledge about drugs and the threat that they pose to our families and the communities that we live in. Only with knowledge can we truly hope to contain the enemy and keep our families safe.