

RECOGNIZING STREET DRUGS

Alcohol, marijuana, opioids, and cocaine are the four most common substances that people use as street drugs.

Use the information in this document to help you recognize these substances if you come across them.

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is a psychoactive substance. It has been widely used for centuries and has the potential to create dependence.

An alcoholic beverage is a drink that contains ethanol. Ethanol is a type of alcohol that acts as a drug, and is produced by the fermentation of grains, fruits, or other sources of sugar.

HOW DO I RECOGNIZE ALCOHOL?

- Alcohol is probably the most recognizable of the substances mentioned here. It's also the substance that you are most likely to encounter. Since it is a legal substance and used socially, many people have it in their homes on a regular basis.
- Types of alcoholic beverages include beer, wine, cider, fermented tea, fermented water, mead, and distilled spirits or liquor.
- Alcoholic beverages typically come in glass bottles or aluminum and have a distinctive alcohol odor.
- In the US, one standard drink contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol. This can be found in:
 - 12 oz. of regular beer, which is usually about 5% alcohol.
 - 5 oz. of wine, which is usually about 12% alcohol.
 - 1.5 oz. of distilled spirits, which is about 40% alcohol.

MARIJUANA

Marijuana comes from the *Cannabis sativa* plant and is a psychoactive drug. It goes by many names, such as weed, dope, herb, pot, grass, bud, reefer, ganja, and Mary Jane.

The main chemical in marijuana is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, also known as THC.

Marijuana can be consumed a number of ways. This includes smoking hand-rolled cigarettes called joints, as well as using pipes, water pipes (bongs), and e-cigarettes (vapes). It can be brewed in a tea or mixed into foods, such as brownies, cookies, or candies.

There are now many products on the market that contain cannabidiol (CBD) oil, which is a chemical found in marijuana. CBD does not contain THC.

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HOW DO I RECOGNIZE MARIJUANA?

- The leaves of the plant have jagged edges (similar to a bread knife), and the leaves fan out like the fingers of a hand.
- Marijuana in plant form usually looks like shredded leaves, stems, seeds, or flowers and is stored in plastic bags. It is usually green, greenish-gray, or brown, and may look like tobacco.
- You may also find edible items containing THC, the active ingredient in the marijuana plant. These edibles might be gummies, cookies, and brownies. Cannabis, marijuana, and THC are also available in vape cartridges known as e-cigarettes.



The Cannabis sativa leaf.

Image source: Wikimedia.org.
June 7, 2009. Public Domain.



Dried cannabis flower.

Image source: Sherpa SEO, from
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under CC 3.0. Photo has been cropped for
size.

- Some states that have legalized marijuana allow the sale of edibles containing THC, and require the packages be marked as containing THC. However, packaging is not regulated in states where edibles are illegal.
- Many manufacturers use packaging that is very similar to common candies and snacks. If anything about the packaging looks unusual, do not consume it.
- Brownies or other baked goods made with marijuana will not smell like a regular brownie. The smell is not exactly like the skunk-like smell of marijuana smoke, but it will smell different than you expect a brownie to smell.
- The packaging for commercially produced baked goods will indicate if it was made with marijuana and how much THC it contains.
- If someone is using marijuana, you might see some types of drug paraphernalia that are specific to marijuana use, such as:
 - Rolling papers (usually brown or white).
 - Pipes.
 - Cigar papers with the tobacco emptied.
 - Bongs.
 - E-cigarettes.
 - Roach clips.
- If someone is smoking marijuana, you will notice a distinct odor that smells musky, piney, or skunky.

OPIOIDS

- Opioids are a kind of drug used to reduce pain. They are a class of drugs naturally found in the opium poppy plant.
- Doctors prescribe prescription opioids to treat moderate to severe pain, but they also have serious risks and side effects.
 - When used as directed and under a doctor's careful supervision, prescription opioids are an effective tool in pain management.
 - However, when used outside of the doctor's directions, they can be very dangerous and lead to overdose.
 - Additionally, there are illegal opioids that people use and abuse that also are very dangerous and can lead to overdose.
- Opioids refers to both natural opioids such as heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and prescription pain relievers, such as morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, methadone, and oxycodone.

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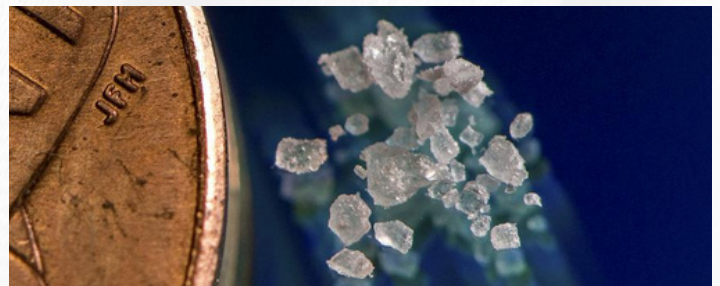
- Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is 50 times stronger than heroin and up to 100 times stronger than morphine. In its prescription form, it is prescribed for pain, but fentanyl is also made illegally. Fentanyl is currently one of the top opioids used and top drugs causing overdose. It is often mixed with other illicit street drugs in pill or powder form.
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Fentanyl in pill form.
Image source: DEA.



Fentanyl in crystal powder form. Image includes a penny for scale.
Image source: DEA.

- Fentanyl is typically distributed as either white powders or as pills, which are made to look like real prescription opioids.
- Illegal fentanyl is also sold as small candies on blotter paper and in eye droppers or nasal sprays.
- Illegal fentanyl is often seen in blue, greenish, or lightly colored pills that may be marked "M20," "K9," "215," or "v48." Some illegal fentanyl pills are brightly colored greens, yellows, pinks, and purples, known as rainbow fentanyl. These bright pills look like candy and appeal to children and youth.



Fentanyl citrate in liquid, injectable form.
Image source: DEA.

- Since fentanyl is so often mixed with other drugs and people may not know what they are really taking, fentanyl test strips are available and a helpful tool to reduce the risk of overdose. They are inexpensive and can give results within 5 minutes to let you know if a drug or pill contains fentanyl. However, they are not 100% accurate and are considered illegal in many states.
- Pharmaceutical fentanyl is a white granular or crystal powder. Illegal fentanyl in powder form is a light-yellow color and is often on thin pieces of cardboard.

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COCAINE

- Cocaine is an addictive stimulant. It is made from the leaves of the coca plant.
- It is known by many nicknames, such as blow, coca, coke, crack, crank, flake, rock, snow, nose candy, white lady, Charlie, white dust, stardust, and soda cot.
- Cocaine is either snorted as a powder, rubbed into the gums, or dissolved in water and injected.
- Freebase and crack cocaine (rocks) is smoked.

HOW DO I RECOGNIZE COCAINE?

- Most people think that cocaine always comes in the form of a white, powdery substance with no smell, but it actually comes in many colors and has a very strong smell. The fine, white powder is the most common form. Sometimes, it is processed into small, irregularly shaped, rock crystals. As a powder or rock, it is most often white to off-white and may be pearly or shiny. It can also be light pink or beige. When it is mixed with other additives, it may be bright white, off-white, or beige.
- Pure cocaine smells sweet and floral. Most often, what is sold on the streets is mixed with additives so it has a chemical or metallic smell. Some chemicals used to manufacture cocaine that have distinct smells that aid in identifying the substance are gasoline, kerosene, diesel, carbonate salt, sulfuric acid, ammonia, potassium permanganate, and caustic soda.
- Cocaine-related paraphernalia includes: small resealable bags (sometimes with pictures or designs on them), razor blades, cut-off straws, small mirrors or flat surfaces with powder residue, aluminum foil, lighters, straws, small metal pipe with a hole at the top, tourniquets, spoons with bent handles, and syringes.



Cocaine.
Image source: DEA.

TAKE ACTION

If you have reason to believe that you or someone you love is using alcohol or drugs and needs to make some changes in their behavior, the sooner you address the issue, the better the outcome. Substance use disorders are treatable, and people can go on to live happy, healthy, and productive lives when connected to the right treatment, supports, and services.

- Reach out to your child's school counselor, a pediatrician, a primary care physician, or a mental health professional.
- Remember that early intervention is always best for your health and well-being.

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