

Diabetes and Drug Use

We don't recommend that you use drugs of any kind for recreation. However, if you choose to use recreational drugs, or are struggling with addiction or overuse of prescription opioids, it's important to know how these substances can affect your diabetes.

How do legal and illegal drugs affect my diabetes?

Legal and illegal substances can lead to extreme highs and lows in your emotions and blood sugar. Learn more about the harmful effects of each substance below:

Depressants, sometimes called "downers," include sedatives, benzodiazepines, heroin, and opioid pain medications. They are highly dangerous and addictive and can lead to:

- Changes to your eating habits and hormone responses, making it difficult to achieve good blood glucose levels
- Euphoria [you-FOR-ee-ah] (extreme elation) followed by drowsiness and confusion, making it difficult to reason and follow your diabetes treatment plan
- Slowed breathing, which can lead to difficulty breathing and death
- Blood vessel damage, leading to collapsed veins, bruising, and poor circulation

Stimulants, sometimes called "uppers," include drugs such as cocaine, crystal meth, and ecstasy (molly). Use of these substances can lead to:

- Changes in your hormone responses, raising your blood glucose levels
- Decreased ability to reason or make decisions
- Hyperactivity
- Decreased appetite
- Hypoglycemic [high-poh-gly-SEE-mik] unawareness
- Increased blood pressure and risk of heart attack or stroke

Hallucinogens, such as LSD and mushrooms can lead to:

- Confusion and out-of-control emotions
- Sleepiness, laziness, and apathy
- Hypoglycemic [high-poh-gly-SEE-mik] unawareness

Marijuana is a mind-altering substance, which means that you act, think, or feel differently when using it. Different strains (types) of marijuana and the different ways in which it can be used can also change or enhance its effects.

In high doses, marijuana can cause low blood glucose. However, high blood glucose is generally more of a risk because marijuana can make people feel hungry, causing them to overeat.

Marijuana also makes people feel so laid-back or uninterested that they don't manage their diabetes—they often miss insulin doses, make mistakes on their doses, or forget to check their blood glucose.

Facts about marijuana

- **Recreational use of marijuana is illegal** according to Utah and Federal law.
- **Medical marijuana can cause the same problems as recreational marijuana.** If you have a prescription for medical marijuana, you need to know how to manage your diabetes when using it, as it can still cause the side effects listed below.
- **Using marijuana may increase your risk for addiction,** anxiety and panic disorders, depression, lung problems, and cancer.
- **Marijuana can impair judgement and decision-making,** short-term memory, and coordination. All of these can increase your risk for motor vehicle accidents.
- **Regular users often have less satisfaction with life** and lower achievement.

Marijuana: What to watch for



Be aware of how you feel. When you're under the influence of a mind-altering substance, you may not be able to recognize if you're feeling "low" or "high" in terms of your BG levels. Your ability to "sense" differences will be altered.



Check your BG levels often. The only way to really know if your BG is high or low is to check it. Keep your testing kit nearby so you can test regularly.



Count your "edible" carbs. Marijuana that is smoked or vaporized doesn't have carbs. But edibles do. For example, a "pot cookie" has carbs, just as other cookies do, so dose your insulin accordingly.



Give bolus injections to cover the "munchies." Hunger can be a side effect of marijuana and you may eat a lot. Be sure to give yourself enough insulin to cover exactly what you plan to eat.



Wear your medical alert bracelet. In case something happens, it's important for emergency personnel to know you have diabetes.

Prescription opioids can make it difficult to recognize highs and lows

Prescription opioids are powerful drugs that should only be used to treat a specific condition and be prescribed by a medical professional for that purpose. Misusing or abusing them can lead to overdose and death. **In Utah, misuse of prescription drugs kills more people than car accidents.**

If you choose to use drugs with diabetes



Know what you're taking. Search for a description of the substance or pill on the Internet. Find out what it is, what it does, and how it might affect your diabetes. Even if it's regularly used by friends or prescribed for another condition, that doesn't mean it's safe for you. **Do not take something if you don't know what it is.**



Make sure you hang out with someone sober who knows you have diabetes. And make sure this person knows what you took.



Don't use with strangers. Know who you're partying with, where you're going, and that your car keys are in the hands of someone sober. Share this information with someone you can trust.



Tell your doctor that you have diabetes. Make a list of all the other medicines you are taking. Include all prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, liquid medicines, patches, inhalers, vitamins, and herbs. Ask how a new medicine might affect your diabetes.



Only take the medicines you are prescribed, in the right amount, at the right time. And don't take more than prescribed. Your prescribed dose is an *instruction*, not a *suggestion*.



Don't take someone else's medicine. You don't know how your body will react. If you have enough pain that you need a prescription pain pill, **call your doctor.**



Know how and when to use naloxone. Naloxone, also called Narcan or Evzio, is a drug that is given by a caregiver or bystander to stop or reverse an overdose caused by prescription opioids or heroin. It can be injected into a muscle or sprayed into the nose.

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