

### **Health Risks Associated with Use of Illicit Drugs and Alcohol**

The use of illicit drugs and the abuse of alcohol carry significant social, physical, and emotional health risks. Users may suffer damage to key body organs such as the heart, liver, kidneys, and central nervous system. Drugs can kill the user, and the use of drugs and alcohol during pregnancy may cause birth defects or death of unborn babies. Drug users may experience difficulties with concentration and memory that impair learning. They can exhibit mood swings, impaired judgment, isolation, and depression, all of which can contribute to impaired driving, injuries, accidents, domestic or random violence, and sexual assault. Drugs can be instrumental in the deterioration of family units and the breakdown of friendships and other support systems.

Columbus State is committed to providing students and employees with drug and alcohol education, counseling, and referral for treatment or rehabilitation.

The College's Coordinator of Mental Health and Drug Prevention Counseling Services (614-287-5416) can provide resources and assistance to students who use drugs or alcohol, and to others whose lives are affected by family members or friends who are users. The drug prevention professionals in the Counseling Center can help choose a local agency which meets student's needs or can answer any specific questions students might have. Counseling Services can be reached at 614-287-2818.

#### **Some Possible Long-Term Effects**

*Provided courtesy of the University of Wisconsin*

**Marijuana and Hashish:** Marijuana and hashish are deleterious to the health and impair the short-term memory and comprehension of the user. When used, they alter the sense of time and reduce the ability of the user to perform tasks requiring concentration and coordination. They increase the heart rate and appetite. Motivation and thinking can be altered, making learning and retaining new information difficult. Long-term users may develop psychological dependence as well as paranoia and psychosis. Because these drugs are inhaled as unfiltered smoke, they damage the lungs and pulmonary system and contain more cancer-causing agents than tobacco.

**Cocaine and Crack:** Cocaine and crack stimulate the central nervous system and are extremely addictive. They can cause psychological and physical dependency which can lead to dilated pupils, increased pulse rate, elevated blood pressure, insomnia, loss of appetite, paranoia, and seizures. They can also cause death by disrupting the brain's control of the heart and respiration.

**Stimulants and Amphetamines:** Other stimulant and amphetamine use have the same effect as cocaine and cause increased heart rates and blood pressure that can result in a stroke or heart failure. Symptoms include dizziness, sleeplessness, and anxiety. Use can also lead to psychosis, hallucinations, paranoia, and even a physical collapse.

**Depressants and Barbiturates:** Depressants and barbiturates can cause physical and psychological dependence that can lead to respiratory depression, coma and death, especially when used in concert with alcohol. Withdrawal can lead to restlessness, insomnia, convulsions, and possibly death.

**Hallucinogens:** LSD, PCP, mescaline, and peyote are classified as hallucinogens. Hallucinogens interrupt the brain messages that control the intellect and keep instincts in check. Large doses can produce convulsions and coma or heart and lung failure. Chronic users complain of persistent memory problems and speech difficulties for up to a year after their use. Because the drug stops the brain's pain sensors,

drug experiences may result in severe self-inflicted injuries. Persistent memory problems and speech difficulties may linger.

**Narcotics:** Users of narcotics, such as heroin, codeine, morphine, and opium, develop dependence and increase the likelihood of an overdose that can lead to convulsions, coma, and death.

**Alcohol:** Alcohol is chemically classified as a mind-altering drug because it contains ethanol and has the chemical power to depress the action of the nervous control system. This depression affects motor coordination, speech, and vision. In great amounts, it can affect respiration and heart rate control. Death can result when the level of blood alcohol exceeds 0.40%. Prolonged abuse of alcohol can lead to alcoholism, malnutrition and cirrhosis.