

Health Risks

Students and employees should be aware of the health risks associated with the use and abuse of alcohol and illicit drugs. Alcohol consumption causes a number of marked changes in behavior. Even low doses significantly impair the judgment and coordination required to drive a car safely, increasing the likelihood that the driver will be involved in an accident. Moderate doses of alcohol also increase the incidence of a variety of aggressive acts, including domestic violence, child abuse, and rape. Moderate to high doses of alcohol cause marked impairments in higher mental functions, severely altering a person's ability to learn and remember information. Very high doses cause respiratory depression and death. If combined with other depressants to the central nervous system, much lower doses of alcohol will produce the effects described.

Repeated use of alcohol can lead to dependence. Sudden cessation of alcohol intake is likely to produce withdrawal symptoms, including severe anxiety, tremors, hallucinations, and convulsions. Alcohol withdrawal can be life-threatening. Long-term consumption of large quantities of alcohol, particularly when combined with poor nutrition, can lead to permanent damage of vital organs such as the brain and the liver.

Mothers who drink alcohol during pregnancy may give birth to infants with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. These infants have irreversible physical abnormalities and mental retardation. In addition, research indicates that children of alcoholic parents are at greater risk than other individuals of developing problems with alcohol.

Drugs interfere with the brain's ability to take in, sort and synthesize information. They distort perception, which can lead users to harm themselves or others. Drug use also affects sensation and impairs memory. In addition to these general effects, specific health risks including substance dependence and death are associated with particular categories of controlled substances.