

What are the short-term effects of using substances, including alcohol and other drugs?

What are the long-term effects of using alcohol and other drugs?

What are the risks of using alcohol and other drugs for an individual?

What are the risks of using alcohol and other drugs for wider society?

Do the following actions increase or decrease risk in relation to personal safety and wellbeing? Or does it depend on other circumstances?

	Increase	Decrease	It depends
1. Drinking a glass of water between alcoholic drinks			
2. Mixing alcohol and other drugs			
3. 'Sleeping it off' after binge drinking too much alcohol			
4. Taking drugs or drinking alcohol with strangers			
5. Having a plan for getting home from a party/ night out			
6. Accepting alcohol or other drugs from a friend			
7. Buying drugs online or via a social media app			
8. Drinking alcohol or taking other drugs in a public place, e.g. a park, a high street			
9. Eating a meal before drinking alcohol			
10. Drinking lots of water to 'flush' drugs out of the body			

Teacher answers

	Increase, decrease, it depends?
1. Drinking a glass of water between alcoholic drinks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease – drinking water or a non-alcoholic drink between alcoholic drinks can help a person to pace themselves, so they do not consume alcohol as quickly. • Alcohol is a diuretic so drinking water can reduce some of the unpleasant effects such as headaches and fatigue. • However, blood alcohol content is what determines how drunk someone is, so water won't make them less drunk if they still drink lots of alcohol, nor will it protect their organs – particularly the liver.
2. Mixing alcohol and other drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase – when alcohol and other drugs are mixed, their effects are exaggerated, which can result in effects ranging from nausea to heart failure. • Alcohol is a depressant, so when combined with a stimulant the two will compete with each other. The depressant drug tries to slow the brain/central nervous system down, while the stimulant tries to speed it up, putting the brain/central nervous system under strain. • Combining alcohol with another depressant drug, e.g. prescription medications such as benzodiazepine (also known as benzos e.g. Xanax) slows the central nervous system even more than alcohol alone which can have potentially fatal consequences. Fake versions of these substances can also be sold online, but the contents are unknown and taking them can have serious consequences.
3. 'Sleeping it off' after binge drinking too much alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase – depending on a person's weight, it takes the body about an hour to process one unit of alcohol (a small glass of wine is about 1.5 units, a pint of lager is about 2 units). • If a person is at risk of alcohol poisoning due to binge drinking, they can be at serious risk if they are left to sleep unattended as their breathing can be affected. • It is important not to try to make the person vomit because they could choke on it. To prevent choking, they should be put in the recovery position, or turned onto their side with their head to the side and a cushion behind them, so they cannot roll onto their back. • It's important to seek help from an adult and/or emergency medical help if alcohol poisoning is suspected.
4. Taking drugs or drinking alcohol with strangers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase – drinking and/or drug use impairs a person's judgment, which could lead to them making decisions they might not normally make, such as having unprotected sex, or damaging property. • Some drugs can lower inhibitions and increase libido which can also impact a person's decision-making. • Additionally, using drugs or alcohol can make a person more vulnerable to personal attacks – be clear, though, that this does not excuse criminal behaviour, such as sexual assault. Taking drugs/drinking alcohol with strangers can also increase risk in relation to someone's personal safety as they do not know how strangers might behave when under the influence of drugs/alcohol. • In addition, while friends might look out for one another when using substances, strangers are less likely to feel any responsibility for getting someone home or checking their safety or wellbeing.
5. Having a plan for getting home from a party/night out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease – it's always a good idea for people to plan ahead, so that they are not left in a vulnerable situation when the night ends or having to make a decision about getting home when their decision-making is impaired. • Having a way to get home (such as a pre-booked taxi, arranged pick-up with parents, route and time planned with friends) helps to ensure a person's safety. • Similarly, it is important someone always let's friends or family know where they are.

Teacher answers

	Increase, decrease, it depends?
6. Accepting alcohol or other drugs from a friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It depends – while accepting a drink from a friend might be safer than from a stranger, the source of the drugs/alcohol should still be questioned. • Additionally, the friend will still not know the make-up of the drugs, so the risks associated with not knowing what is in any street drug are still present. • Some events, such as festivals, have drug testing services – while this can help to ensure someone knows what they are consuming, it does not negate the risks involved in using drugs.
7. Buying drugs online or via a social media app	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It depends – buying drugs online often means that the source is unknown, and substances could contain a whole host of dangerous contents. • Drugs or alcohol may also be out-of-date, diluted, fake, or synthetic (made in a laboratory to mimic a drug, often with more harmful effects), causing great risk to the buyer. • Someone might think they have bought one kind of drug but are sent something else, which may cause greater harm. • Social media can also be very influential in marketing and promoting products to followers, or adding people to their accounts. As their goal is to make a profit, they may make claims about substances that are not true. • However, there are all kinds of risks wherever a person purchases drugs, regardless of whether this is online or in person. Even prescribed medication should be taken as instructed by a medical professional and can be dangerous if used incorrectly.
8. Drinking alcohol or taking drugs in a public place, e.g. a park, a high street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It depends – while drinking/taking other drugs in a public space can make an individual more vulnerable, as their surroundings are not necessarily safe, it does mean that if things go wrong or somebody needs medical attention, there may be a higher likelihood of them getting help. • If an individual uses alcohol or other drugs they may act in a way that may pose more of a risk to those around them. • Councils can restrict the consumption of alcohol in a public space where it is associated with anti-social behaviour. In a controlled drinking area, it is an offence to refuse to stop drinking or surrender alcohol. • Being drunk and disorderly in a public place is also an offence, which can have criminal consequences.
9. Eating a meal before drinking alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease – a meal will delay the rate of alcohol absorption which reduces the feeling of drunkenness as the body can break down the alcohol over a longer period. • But if someone goes on to drink heavily, they will still get drunk; drinking on a full stomach will delay alcohol getting into someone's system, not prevent it.
10. Drinking lots of water to 'flush' drugs out of the body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase – it is a myth that drinking water will 'flush out' or remove some drugs from a person's body and drinking too much (including water) when using some drugs can be dangerous. • Although it is important to drink enough water for the level of activity a person is engaged in (e.g. dancing), drugs such as ecstasy cause the body to release a hormone which stops it making urine. Although this can cause an urge to drink more water, if someone drinks too quickly it might affect the body's salt balance, which can be as dangerous as not drinking enough water.

Resource 3: Getting home

Isla and Charlie have arranged a lift home from their classmate Marek's house party, with Charlie's older sister Beth. They agreed to be picked up at midnight, but after a couple of hours at the party, things start getting out of hand. Although they have had a couple of drinks themselves, a lot of people there seem very drunk, and some have definitely been using something else on top of the alcohol!

They have a sense that trouble's brewing, so they call Beth to ask to be picked up early and she tells them she will leave the pub to collect them now. When she arrives, it is clear she has had several drinks herself. Charlie jumps into the car, but Isla doesn't know what to do. The house is in an unfamiliar area and going with Beth seems like the only option.

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Isla's options might include:

- accepting the lift
- going back into the party
- going back into the house and finding a safe space
- phoning a parent/carer/relative/ friend
- phoning for a taxi with a friend
- walking

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Resource 4: Getting help

Oscar and his friends are at their classmate Marek's house party. Marek lives in a rural area, so there aren't any other houses nearby, and this means they can play the music loudly and have some drinks and smoke without upsetting any neighbours. Everyone is having a great night.

As the night goes on, Oscar notices he hasn't seen Marek in a while and goes looking for him. He knows that Marek recently bought some tablets online, but doesn't know what they are or if Marek has taken any. He finds Marek lying on the floor in another room and can't wake him up. He tells his friends, but they just laugh, saying Marek must be really drunk and needs to 'sleep it off'.

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