

Drugs: What's the "Worst"?

Every year during Drug Facts Chat Day, teens ask, "What is the worst drug?" Different scientists may give different answers, but they all agree that the answer depends on what you mean by "worst."

For example, "worst" can be the drug(s) that causes the most deaths, or one that leads to the most emergency room visits, or that has the highest rate of addiction. You could also measure "worst" by how many people a drug holds back from living up to their potential by causing a drop in school performance.

And the "worst" drug for one person can be different than the "worst" drug for another, since a drug's effects depend on age, genetics, and life experiences.

Review the facts in the table and use them to respond to the scenario that follows.



TYPE OF DANGER	DRUG FACT
Emergency Room Visits	The three drugs most often mentioned in emergency room visits related to drug use are cocaine, marijuana, and prescription drugs.
Addiction	The drugs that have the highest risk for addiction are heroin, cigarettes, and cocaine.
Overall Deaths	Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States—causing almost half a million deaths each year, many of them from cancer.
Overdose Deaths	52 percent of drug overdose deaths in the United States are related to prescription drugs.
Car Crashes	A 2009 study found that 18 percent of drivers killed in an accident tested positive for at least one drug.

THINK ABOUT IT: Weighing the "Worst" Drug

Scenario: Some of your friends are convinced that to fit in with the "cool" crowd they need to try drugs. But they want to avoid the "worst" drugs. To help convince your friends that any drug can be someone's own personal "worst," you've decided to write an article for your school paper. **Choose one** of the questions below and incorporate at least **three** factual pieces of evidence from above. *Bonus:* Gather additional evidence from the article "Teen Questions About Drugs—Answers From Scientists" as well as the Drug Facts Chat Day transcript at teens.drugabuse.gov/chatday2015.

Question A: What does it mean to say that there is no single universal worst drug but, at the same time, that any drug can be the "worst" for a particular individual?

Question B: Why can't comparing the dangers from using different drugs be reliable when trying to figure out which drug is the overall "worst"?