

Glossary

(Adapted from *Lexicon of Alcohol and Drug Terms*, World Health Organisation, Geneva, 1994 and *Ordinary People*, Western Sydney Area Health Service, 1997).

Note: “Inverted commas” around a word means that the expression is slang or jargon.

AA. (Alcoholics Anonymous) A self-help group, based on a 12-step philosophy in which participants support each other in recovering or maintaining recovery from alcohol dependence.

Abstinence. Refraining from drug use at all times.

Alcoholic Hallucinosis. Perceptual disturbances occur in up to a quarter of patients with acute alcohol withdrawal, and include vivid dreams, nightmares, illusions, and, less frequently, hallucinations. Hallucinations can be auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory, or a combination (alcoholic hallucinosi). Visual hallucinations are most common, with imagery of insects, animals, people, or disembodied heads. Sometimes occurring with eye closure or in a darkened room, they are mostly fragmentary and tend to last minutes at a time over several days. Insight varies, and there may be paranoid delusions. Brust, JCM. (1993.)

Alcohol related brain injury (ARBI). A generic term that encompasses chronic impairment of memory and higher mental functions associated with the frontal lobe and limbic system.

Amphetamine. The group of drugs commonly known as “speed”. Sold as white or yellow powder, they can also be sold as tablets or as a liquid in capsules. Amphetamines can be swallowed, inhaled (“snorted”) or injected. One form (ice) can be smoked. When bought illegally, they are often mixed with other substances. Amphetamine is a stimulant.

Anti-depressant. One of a group of psychoactive drugs prescribed for the treatment of depressive disorders. Also used for other conditions such as panic disorder.

“Bad trip”. Substance users’ jargon for an adverse effect of drug use, consisting of any mixture of the following feelings: losing control, distortions of body image, bizarre and frightening hallucinations, fears of insanity or death, despair, suicidal thoughts and strong negative mood. Physical symptoms may include sweating, palpitations, nausea and paraesthesia. A “bad trip” usually refers to the effect of a hallucinogen, but can also refer to amphetamines and other stimulants, antihistamines and sedatives/hypnotics.

Barbiturate. One of the sedative-hypnotic group of drugs that were previously prescribed but are now rarely seen in Australia. With increasing dosage they produce progressive CNS depression, ranging from mild sedation to anaesthesia. Very dangerous in overdose.

Benzodiazepine. One of the sedative-hypnotic group of drugs. Introduced as safer alternatives to barbiturates, they have a general depressant effect on the central nervous system that increases with the dose, from sedation to hypnosis to stupor. Benzodiazepines have significant potential for dependence.

Blood level alcohol. The concentration of alcohol (ethanol) present in blood. The legal blood alcohol limit for driving in NSW is .05.

“Blowing out”. Giving somebody heroin for free.

“Bodgie”. A half-weight or cap that looks like heroin but is mainly rock or chalk, sold as heroin. Also known as a fake.

Brief intervention. A treatment strategy in which a short structured therapy is offered (between five minutes and two hours), on one occasion or spread over several visits. Aimed at helping a person to reduce or stop substance use.

Cannabis. The generic name given to the psychoactive substances found in the marijuana plant *Cannabis sativa*. The main active constituent is Delta 9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

Cap. A small amount of heroin, slightly bigger than a match-head, wrapped in foil.

Cocaine. A powerful CNS stimulant derived from the coca plant, used non-medically to produce euphoria or wakefulness. Often sold as white, translucent, crystalline flakes or powder.

Controlled drinking. Drinking that is moderated to avoid intoxication or hazardous use of alcohol.

Craving. Very strong desire for a substance or for the intoxicating effects of that substance.

Delirium tremens (DTs). An acute confusional state occurring during withdrawal from alcohol, characterised by rapid pulse, clouding of consciousness, dehydration, delirium, elevated body temperature, sweating, extreme fear, hypertension, tachycardia, tremor and hallucinations.

Dependence. A preoccupation with obtaining and using a drug for its psychic effects; the need to keep taking a drug to feel okay. Physical dependence is referred to as neuroadaptation, and means that a person's body has become adjusted to the substance so that the body needs it to function as normal.

Depressant. Any substance that suppresses, inhibits or decreases some aspects of CNS activity. The main classes of CNS depressants are sedatives/hypnotics, opioids and neuroleptics.

Detoxification. The process by which a person is withdrawn from a psychoactive substance on which they are dependent. Usually detoxification refers to supervised withdrawal, which may or may not involve the administration of medication.

Disinhibition. A state of mind where the person feels free from internal constraints on their own behaviour—a loss of inhibitions.

“Drop”. To overdose.

Drug. Any chemical substance used for its effects on bodily processes.

Dual diagnosis. Where a person has a substance use problem(s) and a mental health problem(s) at the same time.

“E”. Ecstasy.

Fit. A needle and syringe, used for injecting any drugs, including opioids and/or amphetamines.

Flashbacks. A perception disorder that can follow hallucinogen use. Flashbacks are a spontaneous recurrence of the feelings that occurred when the person was intoxicated with hallucinogens. These feelings include visual distortions, physical symptoms, loss of ego boundaries, or intense emotions, and the flashbacks can last from a few seconds to a few hours.

Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. The full range of possible effects of foetal exposure to alcohol, from a small decrease in cognitive functioning to poor coordination and motor skills, brain damage, facial deformities, and growth deficits before and after the birth. The term Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is used to indicate the severe end of the range.

“Gear”. Heroin.

Glue sniffing / petrol sniffing. Inhaling fumes from glue, petrol or other volatile substances (also called inhalants, solvents) for their psychic effect.

“Half-weight”. Half a street gram of heroin (the percentage of pure heroin is variable).

Hallucinogen. A substance that alters perception, typically by inducing illusions or even hallucinations. Hallucinogens can include naturally occurring compounds (e.g. magic mushrooms) and are usually taken orally.

“Hanging out”. Withdrawing from opioids.

Hangover. A state that follows excessive consumption of alcohol. Physical features may include fatigue, headache, thirst, vertigo, gastric disorder, nausea, vomiting, insomnia, fine tremors of the hands, and raised or lowered blood pressure. Psychological symptoms include anxiety, guilt, depression, irritability and extreme sensitivity. Usually lasts not more than 36 hours after all traces of alcohol have left the system.

Harm minimisation / harm reduction. The concept of reducing harm associated with substance use without necessarily stopping use. Harm minimisation is the key philosophy for people working with alcohol and other drug issues in NSW. While abstinence is a part of harm minimisation, it is not the only goal.

Harmful use. A pattern of substance use that is likely to cause damage to health—either physical (e.g. hepatitis following injecting of drugs) or mental (e.g. depressive episodes after heavy alcohol intake). Harmful use also commonly has adverse social consequences.

Hashish. A form of cannabis.

Hazardous use. A pattern of substance use that increases the risk of harmful consequences for the user.

Illicit drug. An illegal substance.

Inhalant. Any of a group of gases and highly volatile compounds or mixtures of compounds that are inhaled for their intoxicating effects. Inhalants are also called solvents or volatile substances.

Intoxication. The condition—resulting from use of a psychoactive substance—that produces behavioural and/or physical changes.

“Junkie half”. A half-weight, which is actually only about 0.3 of a gram.

LSD. A type of hallucinogenic substance.

Maintenance therapy. A form of treatment of substance dependence that involves prescribing a substitute drug, e.g. methadone for the treatment of heroin dependence and nicotine replacement therapy for the treatment of tobacco dependence.

Marijuana. Cannabis

Mescaline. A type of hallucinogenic substance, found in the peyote cactus in the south-western United States and northern Mexico.

Methadone. A synthetic opioid drug used in maintenance therapy for those dependent on opioids.

Naloxone. An opioid receptor blocker that reverses the features of opioid intoxication. It is sometimes prescribed for the treatment of opioid overdose.

Narcotic. A chemical agent that induces stupor, coma, or insensibility to pain. The term usually refers to opioids, which are called narcotic analgesics. In general use the term is often used incorrectly to refer generally to illicit drugs.

Narcotics Anonymous (NA). A self-help group based on the 12-step philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous, in which participants support each other in recovering or maintaining recovery from opioid dependence.

Narrowing of repertoire. The tendency of substance use to become progressively stereotyped around a self-imposed routine of custom and ritual. Characterised by reduced variation of dose and type of substance taken, and of time, place and manner of self-administration.

Neuroadaptation. Physical dependence on a psychoactive substance. This means that a person's body has become adjusted to the substance so that if its use is reduced or ceased, the body experiences withdrawal symptoms.

Neuroleptic. One of a class of drugs used for treating acute and chronic psychoses. Also known as major tranquillisers and antipsychotics.

Nicotine. The major psychoactive substance in tobacco, which has both stimulant and relaxing effects. Considerable tolerance and dependence develop to nicotine.

"Nodding", "on the nod". The semi-stuporous state experienced by heroin and high-dose methadone users after the euphoric effects accompanying use have subsided; characterised by head bobbing, bowed head and drooping eyelids.

Opiate. One of a group of substances derived from the opium poppy (opiates), with the ability to induce analgesia, euphoria and, in higher doses, stupor, coma, and respiratory depression. This term excludes synthetic opioids.

Opioids. The generic term applied to alkaloids from the opium poppy, their synthetic analogues, and compounds synthesised within the body.

Overdose. The use of any drug in such an amount that acute adverse physical or mental effects are produced; a dose that exceeds the individual's tolerance. Overdose may produce transient or lasting effects, or death.

Passive smoking. The involuntary inhalation of smoke, usually tobacco smoke, from another person's smoking. Also generally referred to as environmental tobacco smoke.

Pharmaceutical drugs. Substances available from pharmaceutical sources, i.e. manufactured by the pharmaceutical industry or dispensed by a pharmacist.

Polydrug use. Where a person uses more than one drug, often at the same time or following one another, and usually with the intention of enhancing, potentiating, or counteracting the effects of another substance.

Psychoactive substance. A substance that, when ingested, affects mental processes, emotions and behaviour.

Psychotropic. In its most general sense, a term with the same meaning as "psychoactive" i.e. affecting the mind or mental processes.

"Rave". A dance party, often involving the use of psychoactive substances—especially amphetamines and hallucinogens—by participants.

Recreational use. Use of a drug, usually an illicit substance, in social or relaxing circumstances. This term implies that the user is not dependent on the substance; it has the same connotations as "social drinking".

Rehabilitation. The process by which a person with a substance use disorder achieves an optimal state of health, psychological functioning, and well-being.

Reinstatement. Returning to substance use following a period of abstinence.

Relapse. A return to substance use after a period of abstinence.

"Rush". An immediate, intense, pleasurable effect that follows injection of certain substances (e.g. heroin, amphetamine, cocaine).

Salience. A preoccupation with substance use, or seeking the substance, in the user's thoughts or actions.

Sedative/hypnotic. Any of a group of central nervous system depressants that can relieve anxiety and induce calmness and sleep.

"Snowcone". Cannabis sprinkled with heroin.

Solvent. See *inhalant*.

Somnolence. Sleepiness, the state of feeling drowsy, ready to fall asleep.

"Speed". See *amphetamine*.

"Speedball". A combination of a stimulant and an opioid, e.g. cocaine and heroin, amphetamine and heroin.

Steroid. One of a group of naturally occurring or synthetic hormones that affect chemical processes in the body, growth, and sexual and other physiological functions. Steroids can be taken orally or injected.

Stimulant. Any agent that activates, enhances, or increases neural activity of the central nervous system. Stimulants include the amphetamines, cocaine, caffeine, nicotine.

THC. Tetrahydrocannabinol, the main active constituent in cannabis.

Therapeutic community. A structured environment in which people with substance use problems live in order to achieve rehabilitation. Such communities are often specifically designed for drug-dependent people.

Tolerance. A decrease in response to a drug dose that occurs with continued use. Increased doses of the substances are required to achieve the effect originally produced by lower doses.

Tranquilliser. General term for several classes of drugs employed to manage symptoms of various mental disorders. The tranquillisers have a quieting or dampening effect on psychomotor processes without—except at high doses—interfering with consciousness and thinking. In this way they differ from the sedatives/hypnotics, which are used to, among other things, induce sleep. The term tranquilliser is often used to refer to any drug that is used for treating anxiety disorders.

Volatile substance. See *inhalant*.

Wernicke's Encephalopathy. An acute, life-threatening, neurological syndrome consisting of confusion, palsies of the ocular muscles and of gaze (nystagmus), peripheral neuropathy and ataxia. Its most common cause is thiamine deficiency, often associated with long-term excessive use of alcohol. If not treated immediately with thiamine, the patient is likely to progress to a permanent amnesic syndrome (Korsakoff's psychosis). In some cases fatality can occur. **NB:** *Always ensure thiamine is given before glucose if there is any suspicion of Wernicke's.*

Withdrawal syndrome. A series of symptoms that occur

when a person stops or substantially reduces substance use, if they have been using for a long period and/or at high doses.