



# PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

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## WHAT ARE THEY?

New psychoactive substances is the correct term for what the media describes as 'legal highs.' They can be categorised into three types of drugs: uppers, downers and hallucinogens and can be sold as powders, pills, smoking mixtures, liquids and capsules.

## HOW IS IT USED?

The powders and pills/capsules are snorted and swallowed whilst the smoking mixtures are smoked similar to when someone smokes cannabis. Less often but still a worrying trend, is users injecting them which adds more risks in terms of sharing equipment and catching viruses such as HIV.

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS AND RISKS?

They are designed to mimic the effects of more common illegal drugs like cocaine and cannabis but the term 'legal highs' is misleading at this implies they are safe to take. Uppers imitate the effects and risks of cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamine and downers copy the effects of cannabis, GHB and benzodiazepines like valium. The hallucinogens create the same if not worse risks similar as if someone had taken LSD, ketamine or magic mushrooms. One of the biggest problems is that these drugs are being produced weekly and haven't been around for a long time so it's hard to know what the short term and long term consequences will be.

## WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

Since May 2016, the government brought in a law to combat the rise of 'legal highs' drug misuse. Possession will not be an offence, except in a 'custodial institution' ie a prison. But possession with intent to supply or give to friends will carry a maximum of 7 years in prison with an unlimited fine.