

SMART DRUGS



FOCUS

"Honestly the best study drug in my years of experience is a good night's sleep, healthy diet and meditation"

Smart drug survey participant

About this resource

This resource was made with the help of students and young people in Edinburgh, who had experience of taking study drugs, and who responded to an online survey run by Crew in 2018.

Survey links were promoted in local colleges and universities and across Crew's social media.

Quotes used are taken directly from participants who very kindly shared their thoughts and experiences.

The information contained in this booklet does not constitute or replace medical advice and your experience may differ. We cannot accept responsibility for the choices you make after reading this information.

What are smart drugs?



Smart drugs (sometimes called **study drugs** or **nootropics**) are usually taken with the intention of enhancing and improving cognitive ability, focus or concentration.

Stimulants are one of the main types of smart drugs and describe drugs such as:

- **Ritalin** and **Concerta** (methylphenidate, often prescribed for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, ADHD)
- **Adderall** (amphetamine/dex-amphetamine), also prescribed for ADHD and narcolepsy)
- **Modafinil** (a narcolepsy medicine)



The term 'smart drugs' is also occasionally used to refer to other drugs taken to enhance focus, such as micro-dosing LSD, high doses of caffeine or other stimulants.

Some people may use the term **nootropics** to refer to drugs like modafinil, but to others nootropics can mean either naturally occurring substances such as **choline**, **creatine** and **L-Theanine**; synthetic compounds such as **racetams**; or a combination of both known as 'stacks'.

This resource mainly looks at methylphenidate and modafinil (the drugs most commonly taken by respondents to our survey). Effects, risks and harms of other smart drugs can be similar and so the information in this booklet can be used as a starting point for thinking about harm reduction for other drugs too.

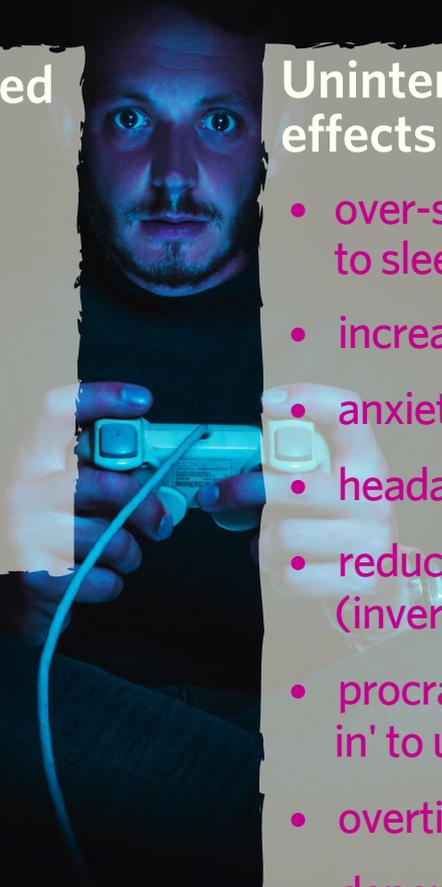
Effects and risks

Intended effects reported include:

- ability to stay awake for longer periods
- increased concentration
- enhanced focus
- increased energy

Unintended or negative effects reported include:

- over-stimulation and inability to sleep
- increased heart rate
- anxiety
- headaches
- reduced ability to concentrate (inverse effect)
- procrastination, being 'locked in' to unintended activities
- overtiredness or exhaustion
- dependence





"In my experience [mixing modafinil and alcohol] produced severe anxiety, loss of focus and body discomfort"

Smart drug survey participant

Polydrug use

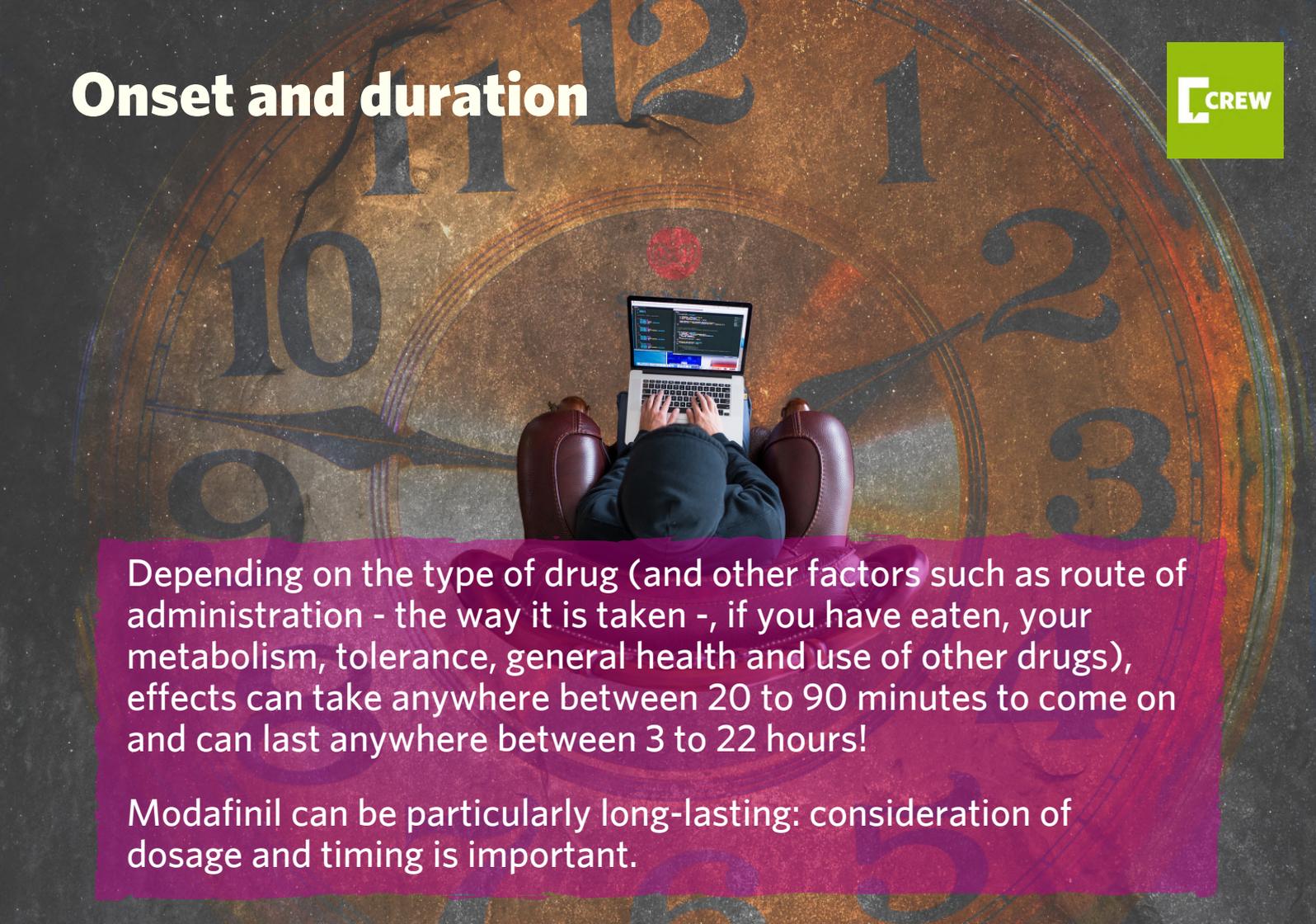
Using smart drugs at the same or similar time as alcohol, prescription medication or other drugs, can have unexpected or unpredictable effects. Even at low doses, some combinations can increase how long effects last, make sleeping more difficult and raise the risk of issues like elevated blood pressure, racing heartbeat, panic attacks and serotonin toxicity.

Legality

Talking about drugs is not a crime but buying, selling, importing and possessing can be. This includes possession of medication not prescribed to you by a GP, or bought without prescription from an unlicensed website ([clearnet*](#) as well as [darknet*](#)).

* The clearnet refers to 'the regular internet' which is open and public, while 'darknet' is an umbrella term referring to the encrypted under-layer of the internet

Onset and duration

A person is sitting in a red leather chair, viewed from above, using a laptop. The scene is set against a large, antique-style clock face with numbers 1 through 12. The clock hands are positioned around 10:10. A red stamp is visible on the clock face near the 12 o'clock position.

Depending on the type of drug (and other factors such as route of administration - the way it is taken -, if you have eaten, your metabolism, tolerance, general health and use of other drugs), effects can take anywhere between 20 to 90 minutes to come on and can last anywhere between 3 to 22 hours!

Modafinil can be particularly long-lasting: consideration of dosage and timing is important.

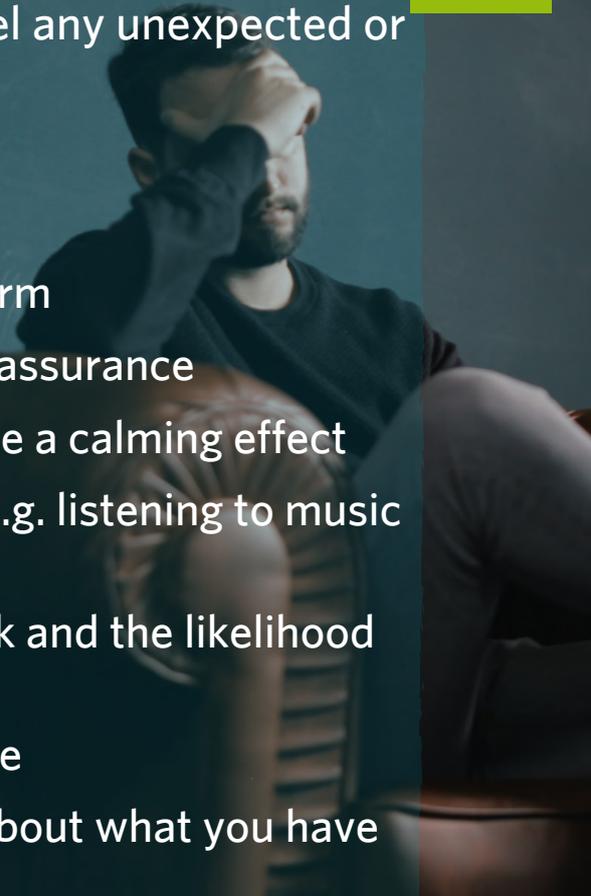
Dosage

- Pharmaceutical drugs come in varying doses e.g. modafinil can come in 50mg to 400mg tablets
- The dose required to achieve an effect will vary for individuals, also depending on mood or environment
- Less is more! There can be an optimum dose for individuals, that when passed, tends to reduce rather than increase focus
- Several survey respondents said that a 200mg tablet dose of modafinil was "too much"
- If prescribed to you, follow the dosage information to help limit unwanted or negative effects
- With drugs that have not been prescribed, the dosage can vary across and within batches
- If taking a drug for the first time, after a break, or a trying a new batch, always take a small test dose beforehand and allow at least 90 minutes for effects to come on

Things not going as you expected?

If you have taken a smart drug and start to feel any unexpected or unintended effects:

- Avoid taking more
- Reduce external noises and bright lights
- Get some fresh air and avoid getting too warm
- Have a safe person nearby for support or reassurance
- Try to regulate your breathing - this will have a calming effect
- Focus on something that is relaxing to you e.g. listening to music or drawing
- Avoid taking other drugs - this increases risk and the likelihood of unexpected effects
- Remember the effects will wear off with time
- Call 999 for help if you need to, be honest about what you have taken, how much and when



What to do in an emergency

If you, or anyone you know, starts to experience any of the effects described below call 999 immediately:

- chest pains
- extreme confusion or severe agitation
- uncontrollable shivering or shaking



- overheating and an inability to control body temperature
- stomach pains and/or continuous vomiting

In an emergency, stay with the person and reassure them until help arrives. Be honest about what they have taken, how much and when.

Harm reduction

All drug use has risks, but if you choose to take smart drugs then the following information may help to reduce harm:

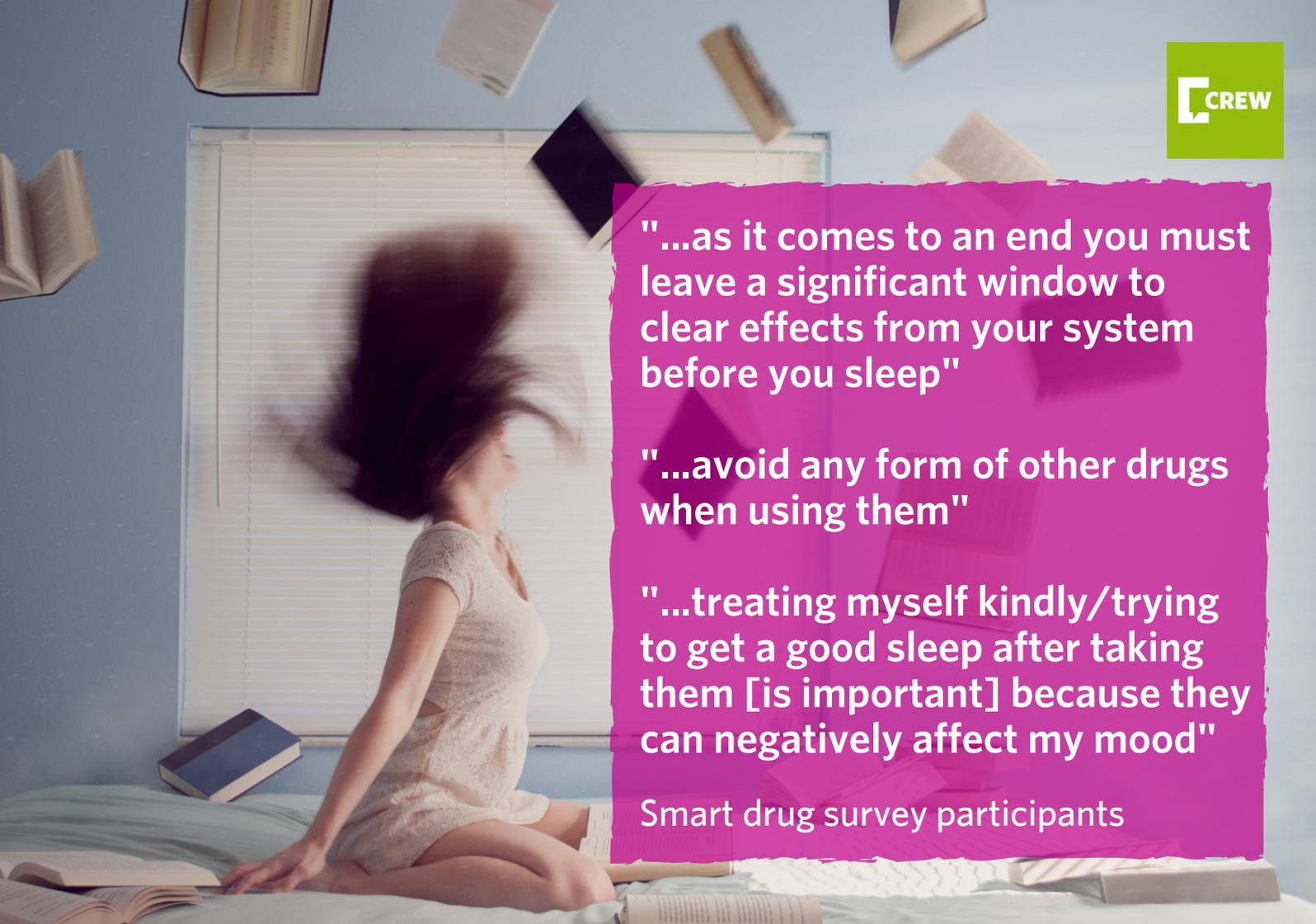
- Spend at least two hours researching any drug that you plan to take and be aware that drugs can affect individuals differently
- Make sure you are well rested, have eaten and are well hydrated
- Check your 'set' (mood and mental well-being): feelings like anxiety can be amplified during and after use
- Check your 'setting' (environment): is it safe? Is it messy or noisy? Do you have potential distractions or other commitments to remember? Could you access help if needed?
- Be aware that counterfeit drugs exist. Contents can vary across and within batches and the drug and/or dose may be different to that which has been advertised

Harm reduction



- Set out a clear plan for activity, including things you may forget to do, such as eat, drink regular sips of water and take breaks to stretch
- Drugs can lower inhibitions so think about consent and safe sex!
- Dose low and avoid mixing with prescription medication or any other drugs, including alcohol. Effects can be unexpected, unpleasant or risky
- Stimulants can affect your sleeping pattern. Avoid frequent redosing and take time to rest
- Smart drugs can potentially impact your mental well-being. Take breaks between sessions - give your body and mind time to recover

If you are concerned about any aspect of your drug use, please speak to your GP, student welfare team or a support service such as **CREW**

A woman with long dark hair is sitting on a bed in a room with light blue walls. She is wearing a white lace top and shorts. Her hair is blowing in the wind, creating a sense of motion. Several books are floating in the air around her, some open and some closed. A window with white blinds is visible behind her. The overall scene is surreal and dreamlike.

"...as it comes to an end you must leave a significant window to clear effects from your system before you sleep"

"...avoid any form of other drugs when using them"

"...treating myself kindly/trying to get a good sleep after taking them [is important] because they can negatively affect my mood"

Smart drug survey participants

Distraction

Many people consulted for this resource talked about 'distractions', either as something that was:

- preventing effective study to start with, or
- an unintended effect of taking a smart drug.

What might be distracting or preventing you from naturally getting 'in the zone'?



Stress Meditation, quality sleep and exercise can help you focus and reduce stress and anxiety. If you think there is an underlying cause for your stress, then getting support for this, such as counselling, is important.

Physical environment Mess and clutter can impact on relaxation and focus, as can a noisy environment.

Diet Some foods can leave you feeling sluggish or low in energy; others actively increase brain activity, like choline in broccoli and L-Theanine in green tea (though it also contains caffeine!).

Insomnia Insomnia can be caused by many things but it is worth considering how much natural light you are getting, and how much blue light from electronic devices you are exposed to.

Blue light lowers release of the body's sleep hormone, melatonin. Apps are available for phones and computers to reduce the levels of blue light at certain times of the day.



"I don't think study drugs should be punished as it would allow further stigmatisation.... [people] should have services to help"

Smart drug survey participant

For more information and support



CREW.SCOT | 0131 220 3404

Free information, non-judgemental and confidential chat and counselling for anyone concerned about their stimulant drug use

KNOWTHESCORE.INFO | 0800 587 587 9

Free phone, text and email support, 7 days a week

STUDENT SUPPORT AND WELFARE SERVICES

Colleges and universities often have dedicated services for students needing support, for any reason. Check your local college or university for more information or visit: www.thinkpositive.scot

ONLINE FORUMS

Various online forums such as Erowid, Bluelight and Reddit can be useful for discussion and to help understand differences in experience. Please be mindful that forum user responses about effects and dosage are subjective - your experience may differ.



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