

# SMART DRUGS



# FOCUS

V2.0 2025

**"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
- over-tiredness or exhaustion
- reduced appetite (unable to eat)
- dependence

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

**Smart drug survey participant**



## Polydrug use

Taking smart drugs with prescription medication or other drugs (including alcohol) can have unexpected or unpredictable effects.

Even at low doses, some combinations can increase how long effects last, lead to poor sleep habits and increase the risks of high 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 that is not prescribed to you by a GP, or bought without prescription from an unlicensed website (★).

★ This includes social media, messaging apps, websites or the 'darknet', which is an umbrella term referring to the encrypted under-layer of the internet.



# Onset and duration



Depending on the type of drug and other factors — such as the route of administration (how it is taken), whether you have eaten, your metabolism, tolerance, general health, and the use of other drugs — the effects can take anywhere from 20 to 90 minutes to appear and may last from 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, 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; the effects could increase with the dose so give it time. Remember the effects will wear off with time.
- 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.
- 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

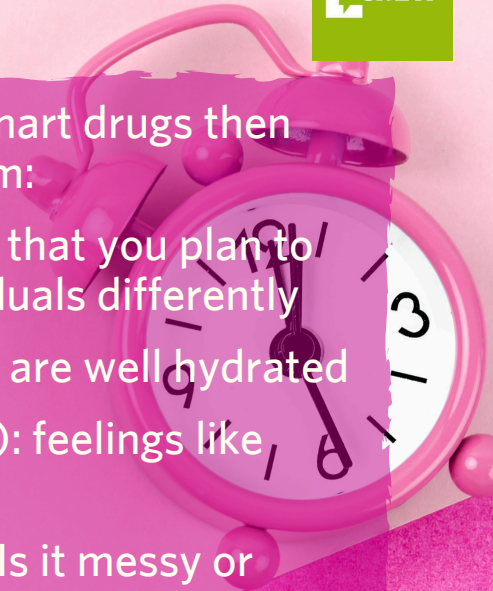
**In an emergency, stay with the person and reassure them until help arrives. Be honest about what they have taken, how much and when.**



# 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

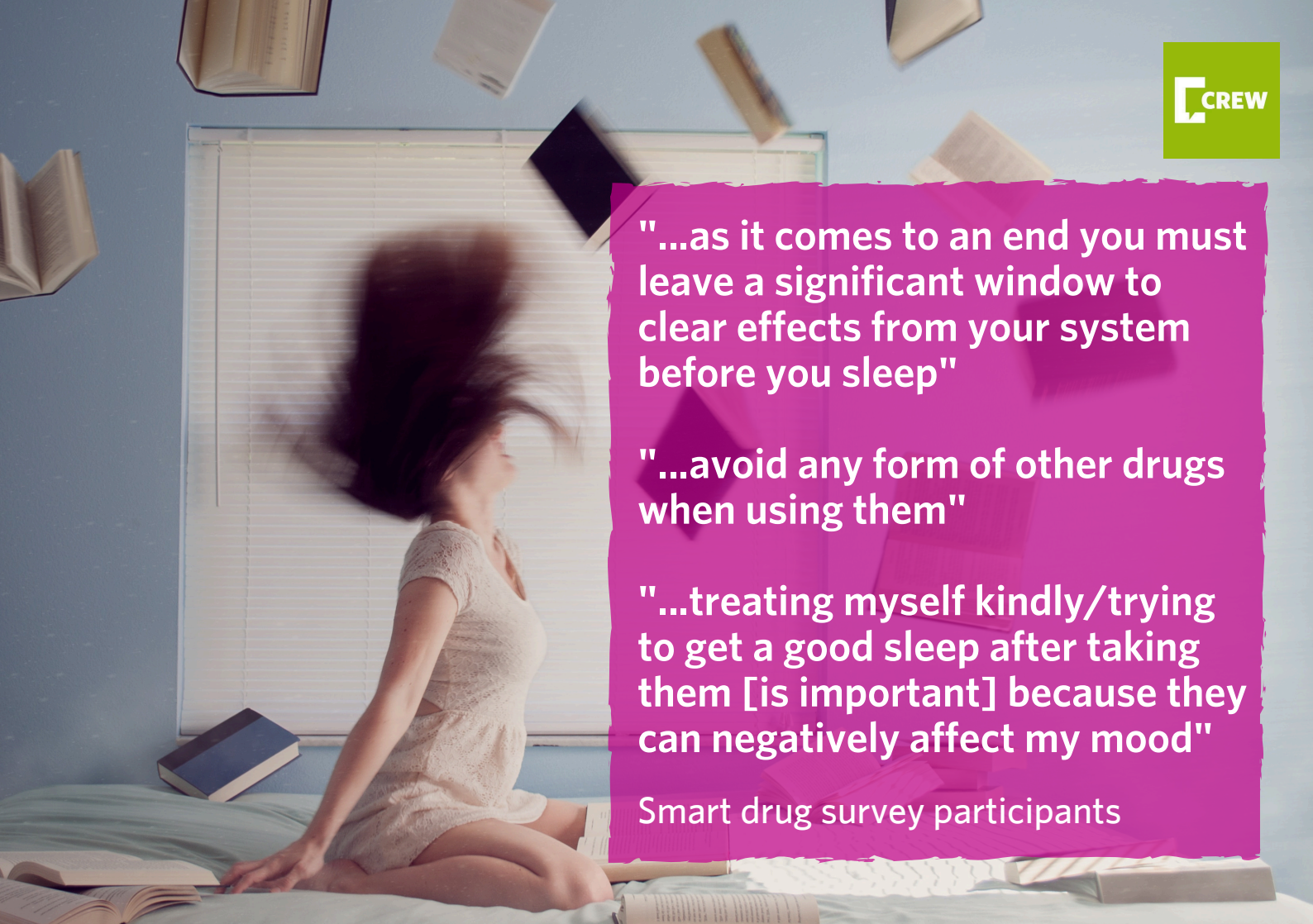




# Harm reduction

- 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 digital support service via [crew.scot](https://crew.scot)



"...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

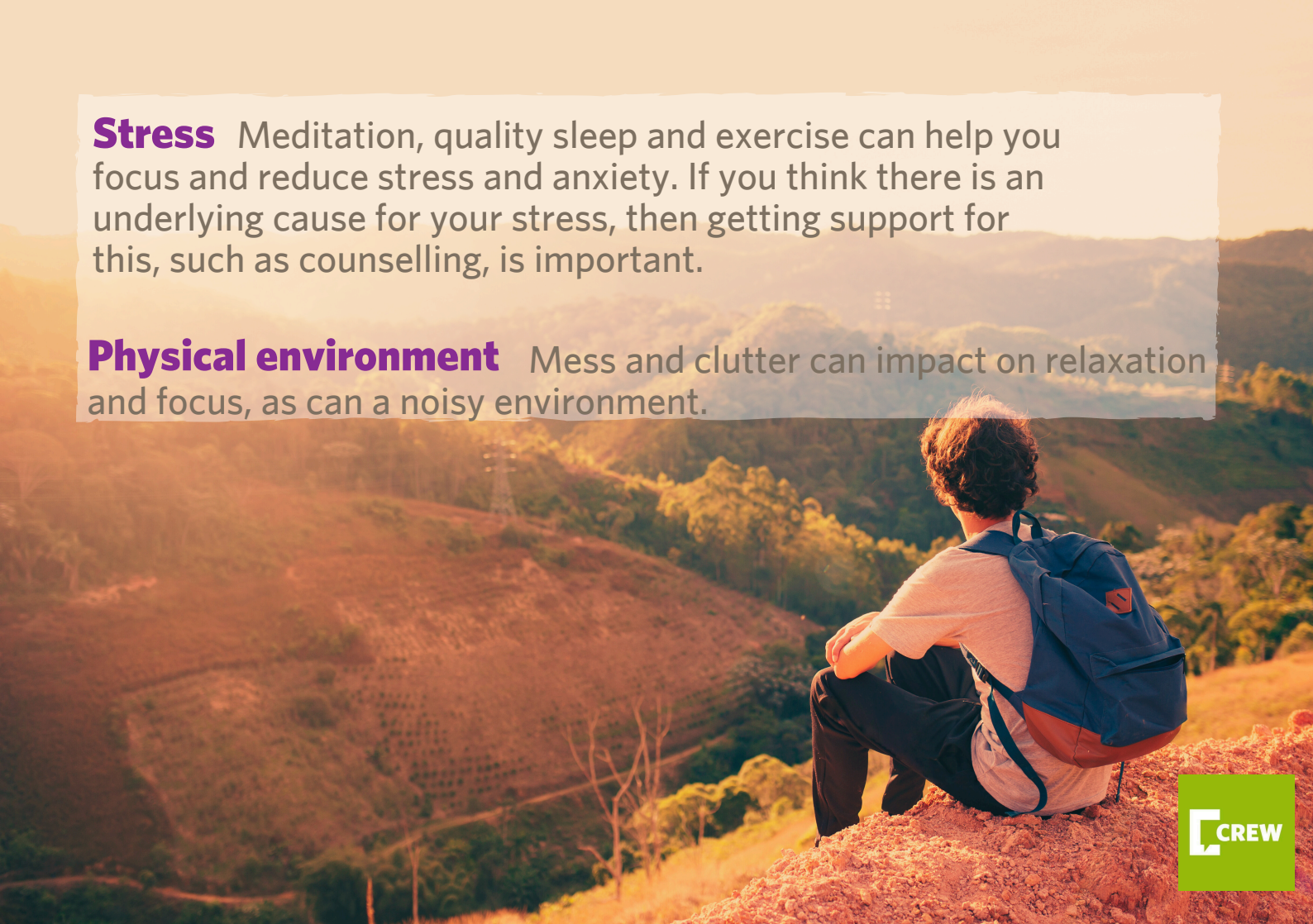
Many people consulted for this resource talked about 'distractions', either as something that was:

- 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'?**





A person with curly hair, wearing a light-colored t-shirt and dark pants, is sitting on a rocky ledge. They are wearing a blue and orange backpack and looking out over a vast valley. The valley is filled with green trees and rolling hills, with a power line visible in the distance. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a hazy, atmospheric effect.

**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](http://www.thinkpositive.scot)

## **ONLINE FORUMS**

Various online forums such as Erowid 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.



# WHERE TO FIND US:

**32 Cockburn Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1PB**

**Email: [DropIn@crew2000.org.uk](mailto:DropIn@crew2000.org.uk)**

**Text: 07860047501**

**Website: [www.crew.scot](http://www.crew.scot)**

**Instagram: @Crew\_2000**

**Twitter: @Crew2000**

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