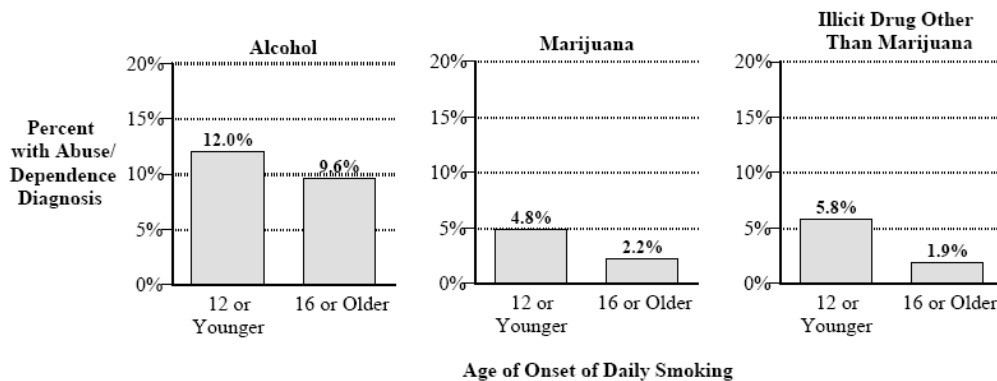


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Smoking by Age 12 Related to Alcohol and Drug Abuse/Dependence

Youths who begin smoking at age 12 or younger are more likely to meet the criteria for past year alcohol and drug abuse or dependence, according to a recent analysis of data from the National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). Twelve percent of youths who initiated daily smoking at age 12 or younger met the diagnostic criteria for past year alcohol abuse or dependence, compared to 9.6% of those who began smoking at age 16 or older. The difference was more pronounced for illicit drug use. Youths who began smoking at age 12 or younger were more than twice as likely to meet the criteria for marijuana abuse or dependence (4.8% vs. 2.2%) and three times as likely to meet the criteria for abuse or dependence on an illicit drug other than marijuana (5.8% vs. 1.9%). The study also found that teens who start smoking early are more likely to report symptoms of mental illness, such as hopelessness, depression, and worthlessness (data now shown). According to the authors, “nicotine is hazardous to the adolescent brain, affecting it differently than an adult brain and increasing a young person’s vulnerability to the effects of smoking. The relationship between early smoking and later use of other addictive substances or mental illness may be the result of critical changes in the brain that can be caused by exposure to nicotine” (p. ii).

Percentage of U.S. Youth Ages 12 to 17 with a Past Year Diagnosis of Abuse or Dependence on Alcohol or Illicit Drugs, by Age of Onset of Daily Smoking



SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, *Tobacco: The Smoking Gun*, October 2007. Available online at <http://www.casacolumbia.org>.