

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

When the term *substance abuse* is used, what usually comes to mind for many is the abuse of *drugs*. In truth substance abuse encompasses much more and includes items often overlooked. Even the term *drugs* are often misperceived as ‘hard’ drugs like cocaine or methamphetamine, when the list of all drugs, legal and illegal, is much longer. Substance abuse is more accurately defined as **anything inhaled, ingested, injected, or absorbed into the human body in sufficient quantity that causes negative impacts, immediate or long-term**. We will briefly examine substances in four categories: tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and other substances.

Tobacco

Tobacco (*Nicotiana*, (*nicotine*, an addictive substance) has been consumed by humans throughout history in every culture. Primary consumption is inhaling smoke from its leaves. But its uses and abuses come in other forms, most well-known and others little known from history:

Inhaling the smoke of cigarettes, cigars, and pipes.

Chewing raw tobacco.

Snuffing tobacco placed between the cheek and gum, and inhaled.

Poultices of tobacco leaves placed on the skin to relieve itching and mild pain.

Treatment for rattlesnake and insect bites.

Therapeutic application— earaches, toothaches, catarrh, colds, and fevers; as an aid to digestion; in prevention of hunger and thirst; as a purgative and as a narcotic.¹

Uses for those who suffer from ADHD/ADD, Schizophrenia, Alzheimer’s, and Dementia.

Despite real or perceived benefits to tobacco use, tobacco kills more human beings than any other herb. Here are some facts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):²

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death in the U.S.

About 34 million US adults smoke cigarettes, and 58 million nonsmokers are exposed to secondhand smoke. Every day, about 1,600 young people under age 18 try their first cigarette, and nearly 200 become daily cigarette smokers.

Cigarette smoking causes more than 480,000 deaths annually in the U.S., including 41,000 deaths from secondhand smoke. For every American who dies because of smoking, at least 30 are living with a serious smoking-related illness. The global annual death toll is around 3,000,000.

Smoking-related illness cost the United States over \$300 billion each year, including more than \$225 billion in direct medical costs.

There are no direct references to tobacco or tobacco use in the Bible. However, given the serious damage tobacco use and abuse wreaks on the human body, noted above, tobacco consumption should be limited to use prescribed by a doctor or avoided altogether. It is addictive, unhealthy to the user and those around them, and a habit that does not honor God. Countless millions have been delivered from the power of tobacco with God's help.

Alcohol

Alcohol that can be consumed by humans comes from fermenting carbohydrates such as sugars and starches found in plant substances or fruits, e.g., grains like rye, barley, and wheat or most fruits such as grapes, oranges, or peaches. Yeast is utilized in the fermentation process, converting sugar into energy. This process creates byproducts like alcohol and carbon dioxide. Some fermented products, like wine, can be further distilled to concentrate and purify to stronger forms of alcohol like vodka or tequila.

Whether wine or stronger drink, alcohol is an intoxicating drug and can be addictive for humans. Distilled alcohols like vodka, whiskey, brandy, gin, tequila, rum, and others have a much higher alcohol content, known as *proof*, and increase Blood Alcohol

Concentration (BAC) rapidly. Beer and wine with lower alcohol content increase BAC at a slower rate and need to be consumed in larger quantities to cause intoxication.

Stronger distilled spirits are mentioned *infrequently* in the Bible and are associated with someone who is 'raging' (**Proverbs 20:1 KJV**) or a 'riotous brawler' (**Proverbs 20:1 AMP**). Wine is mentioned *often* in the Bible and though consumption is never explicitly forbidden, cautions are given about excessive use. Please consider these thoughts on wine³:

Debate exists whether the wine mentioned in the Bible was fermented (intoxicating) or whether it was just grape juice. Grape juice concentrate can be produced by boiling grapes but could not be preserved for any practical period of time without fermenting.

All Jewish people drank wine. Even the Levitical priests drank wine except when they entered the Tent of Meeting in the tabernacle in the wilderness or the Temple in Jerusalem (**Leviticus 10:8-9**). When special vows were made to the Lord, some refrained from wine. The Nazirites (**Numbers 6:1-4**), and the Rechabite family (**Jeremiah 35:1-11**) are examples from the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, most dietary issues of the Law were replaced with grace and the leading of the Spirit. The apostle Paul instructed, "(T)he kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (**Romans 11:17**). Or consider the words of Jesus, "What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean' (**Matthew 15:11**).

Jesus instituted communion with bread and wine (**Matthew 26:27-28**). At the Last Supper, the cup was filled with wine and Jesus told the disciples to drink. In their culture, the cup would not have been filled with grape juice.

Jesus turned water into wine for wedding guests at Cana in Galilee (**John 2:1-11**), the first of many miracles that would follow. The master of the banquet, when commenting on the wine Jesus had created, said "you have saved the best till now" (**John 2:10**), something that would never be said of grape juice.

Despite the claims of many today, Jesus drank wine (**Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34**).

God's purpose and design of wine is to gladden man's heart (**Psalm 104:14-15**).

There are health benefits to drinking wine. The Apostle Paul instructed the younger Timothy, "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses" (**1 Timothy 5:23**).

"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery (extreme indulgence in bodily pleasure). Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (**Ephesians 5:18**) (amplification added).

The question needs to be asked, 'Is it sinful to drink wine or any form of alcohol?' Sin is found in the heart of man and does not exist in the object itself. Intoxication and drunkenness are sinful. It is when you drink too much that you sin. More on this is shared in **Biblical Guidance and Admonitions**.

Drugs

There are many drugs available to humans, a world of them. They can be ingested, injected, inhaled, or absorbed through the skin. The Recovery Village Drug and Alcohol Rehab website⁴ provides this list of the major drug types, the drugs associated with each type, and risks for the human body. The seven major types of drugs are:

<u>Type</u>	<u>General Impact on the Human Body</u>
Stimulants	Speed up the central nervous system, increasing alertness, heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and blood glucose levels.
Opioids	Kill pain and produce a sense of euphoria.
Depressants	Work the opposite of stimulants and slow down bodily functions.
Hallucinogens	Cause hallucinations.
Dissociatives	Distort perception of reality, making one feel they are watching themselves from outside their bodies. They produce a false sense of invincibility, causing many to engage in risky behavior such as driving under the influence or having unsafe sex.

Inhalants	Provide brief feelings of euphoria by inhaling fumes from paint thinner, gasoline, glue, aerosol sprays, room deodorizers, and others.
Cannabis	Also known as marijuana, acts like a hallucinogen but produces depressant-like effects. Can be smoked, vaporized, or eaten.

The Bible has no direct references to drugs. Though the use of drugs traces to ancient civilizations, the inventory of available modern drugs has increased dramatically in recent centuries. Many drugs are prescribed by physicians and provide positive outcomes when taken responsibly and as prescribed. But many drugs are used by choice or abused through addiction, causing serious bodily harm, death, and untold problems for families and friends. For anyone abusing drugs, we recommend intervention and rehabilitation. Recovery is difficult, but not impossible. Family and friends can play a major and needed role.

Other Substances

Are tobacco, alcohol, and drugs the only substances that can be abused? Absolutely not. The foods and beverages you consume can be abused when over-eaten to your detriment. A balanced diet of sufficient nutrients and calories results in health and well-being. An unbalanced diet with too much of any food or drink could be abusing your body.

Excessive eating and drinking, termed *gluttony* in the Bible (**Proverbs 23:2, 20-21**), can result in unhealthy weight gain and other medical challenges. Gluttony is called destructive and believers engaging in it are called “**enemies of the cross of Christ**” (**Philippians 3:18-19**).

Biblical Guidance and Admonitions

Substance abuse not only causes negative impacts to the human body, but it is also not the perfect will of God for our lives. Many of the substances documented in this article are immediately abusive and harmful when taken into our bodies; examples include drugs not prescribed by a physician, tobacco, and strong drink. Most other substances have God-designed benefits for our bodies and are only abusive, harmful, or sinful when we indulge in them excessively; for example, prescribed medications, food, and most beverages).

The key for followers of Jesus Christ is **discipline and moderation**. Here is good biblical guidance along those lines, “**And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be**

filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (**Ephesians 5:18-20**). The admonition is not that drinking wine is sinful, but that drinking it to excess is sinful.

Some struggle mightily with discipline and moderation. If that is you, it would be better to abstain from consuming anything that tempts you to excess, abuse, or sin. If you cannot have one serving of potato chips, but regularly eat the whole bag, you should consider removing potato chips from your diet. If you cannot drink one or two beers and stop there, but always end up drinking a six-pack, beer is not for you. If you cannot limit yourself to a glass of wine or two, but end up drinking the whole bottle, stop drinking wine.

Our bodies are God’s creation. They are what the Bible calls the temple or dwelling place of God. “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple” (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**). If you cannot live with discipline and consume in moderation, you should sacrificially lay aside whatever tempts you into gluttony and out of the will of God. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (**Romans 12:1**). Here are a few other scriptures for your review and consideration:

1 Corinthians 6:12, 20

Galatians 5:16, 19-21

Ephesians 5:18

1 Peter 5:8

Closing Thoughts

God has provided many good things for us to consume and enjoy. But not all of them are healthy for us – physically or spiritually. Be disciplined. Consume only what God wants you to consume. Even then, do it in moderation. Be led of the Spirit.

This is an introduction on the subject of **Drug Abuse**. Here are some other resources you may wish to explore:

¹ [It Ain't Just For Smoking: Known But Beneficial Uses For Tobacco | Ready Nutrition](#)

² [Tobacco Use | CDC](#)

[Medicinal uses of tobacco in history \(nih.gov\)](#)

www.brfwitness.org/a-life-gone-up-in-smoke/

[What the Bible Says About Smoking - Bible Resources](#)

³ [14 Reasons God Approves Wine in the Bible | Reformed Health](#)

[A Theology of Wine — Doctrine and Devotion](#)

[Wine Definition and Meaning - Bible Dictionary \(biblestudytools.com\)](#)

[Did Jesus change the water into wine or grape juice? | GotQuestions.org](#)

[Where Do Alcoholic Beverages Come From? \(thoughtco.com\)](#)

[What the Bible Says About Drinking Alcoholic Beverages - Bible Resources](#)

⁴ [Types of Drugs | The Recovery Village Drug and Alcohol Rehab](#)

www.brfwitness.org/freedom-from-drug-abuse/