C&A Athletes Strong for Mental Health

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# Substance Use among athletes

## What could substance use look like?

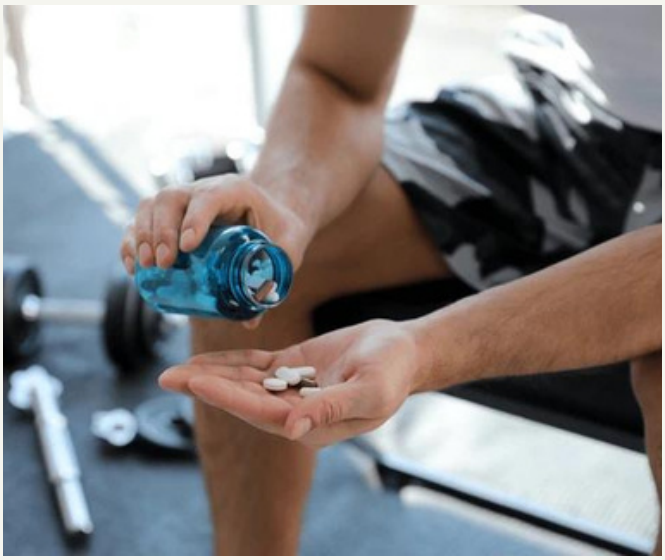
Recognizing signs of substance use in athletes—such as alcohol, chewing tobacco, steroids, vaping, or stimulants—can be challenging for coaches and parents. Signs include sudden weight changes, bloodshot eyes, increased injuries, mood swings, changes in social circles, fatigue, or decreased performance. Timely intervention is crucial for supporting athletes' health and performance.

## How could substance use hurt an athlete's performance?

Using substances can significantly impact athletes' feelings and performance. Athletes may believe substances like marijuana or alcohol improve focus or help them relax. However, these substances often hinder elite performance rather than enhance it.

Substances such as opioids, alcohol, coffee, and marijuana affect our neurochemistry and physiology over time, impacting mental health immediately and potentially leading to long-term issues. Initially euphoric effects can give way to more troubling consequences.

For coaches and parents, understanding these dynamics is crucial. For instance, alcohol use can lead to anxiety and depression—a single glass might cause anxiety upon waking, while two could trigger depression. Awareness of these potential effects can help guide supportive actions and interventions to ensure athletes maintain both physical and mental well-being while striving for peak performance.



## Impact of prescription medication use

In some cases, medication prescribed by a mental health professional or doctor can positively impact a coach's or athlete's well-being, depending on the situation and timing. In addition to their intended effects, medications for anxiety or depression can affect physiology, aiding in pain management, nervous system regulation, or cardiovascular health.

However, they may also lead to side effects such as weight gain. Athletes should advocate for their health, understanding why and when they take medications under professional guidance.

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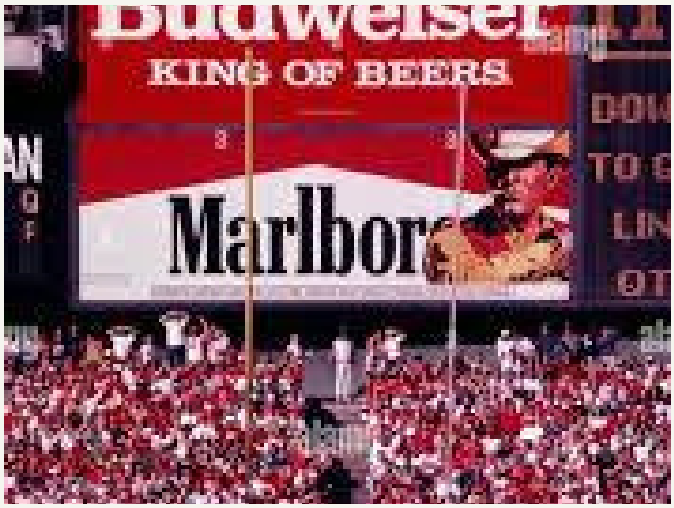
# Detecting an athlete is using a substance

## Parents tailgating before a high school event

Parents can responsibly socialize with adult beverages before an athletic event, but they should consider their intentions and focus on supporting their child. It's important for parents to be mindful of their behavior and ensure that their presence enhances, rather than detracts from, their child's experience during and after the game.

## Messages of substances at college and pro stadiums

It's important not to react impulsively but to acknowledge that certain substances are commonplace at stadiums. At the collegiate level, items like vitamins, supplements, and pre-workouts are legally sold and widely accepted. While they're normalized and considered safe, they can still impact an athlete's brain and body. This cultural acceptance raises awareness about what we consume and its effects on our health.






## If athlete is struggling, best way for parent/coach to help

Schools and parents should approach young athletes with open-mindedness, understanding that mistakes are part of learning. It's crucial to explore why athletes use substances, what they gain from them, and whether they are using them safely. Connecting athletes with specialized counselors is essential for supportive intervention. Punitive measures like zero-tolerance policies without therapeutic support may hinder rather than help. Offering love, support, and therapy alongside consequences can better guide athletes towards responsible choices and growth.

**Information provided by Dr. Steve Graef, PhD. , a sports psychologist and performance coach based in Columbus. He is the owner of Mindurance – services to help athletes, performers and professionals. For more information, visit www.mindurance.org**