

Ask the Doctor



Why staying drug-free is important for you

BY BEATRICE NAKIBUUKA

Lately, doctors in Uganda have noticed something worrying: some school children, even those who are still in primary schools, are drinking alcohol, local brews and using drugs. They may have been introduced to them by their parents, relatives, communities or from an advert on television. Alcohol and drugs may seem small or harmless at first, but they can quietly damage a child's health, behaviour, and future. It is important for us to understand them early so we can make good choices and stay safe.

What are alcohol and drugs?

Alcohol is found in drinks like beer, *waragi*, and wine. Some adults drink alcohol, but it is not safe for both adults and children at all. Drugs are substances that can change how a person feels or behaves. Some drugs are given by doctors to help sick people, but others are illegal and very dangerous.

According to Dr Henry Sekyanzi, a general physician, alcohol and drugs can damage the body, especially important parts like the brain, heart, and liver.

He says, "For children, whose bodies are still growing, this damage can be very serious. They also affect how the brain works, making it hard for a person to think clearly, remember things, or make good decisions."

When someone starts using alcohol or drugs, they may find it hard to stop. This is called addiction, and it can destroy a person's future. A child who uses alcohol or drugs may also struggle in school.

They may fail to concentrate in class, miss lessons, or perform poorly in exams. In addition, people under the influence of alcohol or drugs can get into trouble easily because they may fight, fall, or be involved in accidents.

Why do some people use them?

Some people use alcohol or drugs because they are curious or because their friends pressure them to try. Others may copy what they see older people doing. However, just because others are doing something does not mean it is right.

How can we stay safe?

It is important for every child to learn how to refuse. If someone offers you alcohol or drugs, you should say "No" firmly and walk away. Choosing good friends is also very important, because good friends will encourage you to make the right choices. If you ever feel confused or pressured, you should talk to a trusted adult such as a parent, teacher, or guardian. Keeping yourself busy with positive activities like sports, reading, and school work can also help you stay away from bad influences.

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