

What is Prevention

The adolescent brain is rapidly developing, which makes it more vulnerable to alcohol and drugs than the adult brain.¹

The adolescent brain continues to develop until a person is in their **early to mid 20s**², with the regions of the brain that keep emotions and impulses under control and help us make decisions among the last to develop.²

This is also why adolescents are more likely to engage in risky behaviors and make impulsive decisions, such as trying drugs and alcohol in the first place.²

Protecting the brain during this period of development is an important part of prevention.²

The earlier someone starts using substances, the greater their chances of developing a substance use disorder.²

Ninety percent of those who have a substance use disorder started using alcohol or drugs before they turned 18.³

Prevention is about delaying the onset of first use, or pushing it back as long as possible,⁴ whether alcohol, tobacco or marijuana—the most commonly used substances among teens.⁵

Other factors that put an adolescent at risk besides the age of first use include parental substance use, trauma, and a lack of social attachments,²

These individual factors are part of the “big three” in prevention⁶

- **Individual**
- **Environmental**
- **Genetic**

Environmental factors include high drug availability, poverty, and exposure to violence.²

And then there are **genetic factors**, which research suggests account for about half of a person's likelihood of developing a SUD.⁷

While we can't change our genetics, knowing about family history of SUD can help empower us to make different decisions about our substance use.

For every risk factor, there is a protective factor to counter-balance it.⁸

Prevention focuses on strengthening the protective factors that we can control to decrease the likelihood that a person or community will struggle with addiction.⁸

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Sources

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⁸ National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Lessons from Prevention Research, March 31, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/lessons-prevention-research>

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