

How long do drugs stay in your system?

Drugs affect people in many different ways. The length of time a drug stays in a person's system depends on a number of factors. These include the person's:

- **metabolism**
- **body mass**
- **amount and frequency of drug use and the types of drugs used**

Detecting drugs in a person's system also depends on the method used to test for drugs, which include urine, blood, saliva and hair testing. The most common method used is urine testing. The estimated time it takes for a selection of illicit drugs to leave the body, based on a urine test, is as follows:

- **amphetamines – 2 to 4 days**
- **cocaine – 2 to 4 days**
- **MDMA (ecstasy) – 2 to 5 days**
- **LSD – 1 to 4 days**
- **cannabis (occasional use) – 1 to 5 days**
- **cannabis (regular, long-term use) – up to 6 weeks**

Cannabis is unique in that it is stored in the fatty tissues and released slowly into the bloodstream before it is excreted from the body.

Workplaces, sporting bodies and the police may use different types of drug testing for different reasons including to promote safety, prevent use and to enforce laws.

It is important to remember that, if you are found with illicit drugs in your possession, you could face fines and/or a prison sentence, as well as a possible criminal record.

How do they test for drugs?

Whether or not a person has used drugs can be measured in a number of ways (e.g., blood, hair, urine and breath analysis). Breath testing is usually used to assess alcohol use. Urine testing is the more common test for illicit drugs, although a saliva test is used in roadside drug testing (with a blood test being needed to confirm the presence of a drug should a positive test be identified).

Usually, urine tests measure the presence of drug 'metabolites', not the actual drugs themselves. Metabolites of some drugs can be detected several days after use. For example, amphetamines may be detected two to four days after use, while cannabis may be detected weeks after regular use of the drug.

What types of drug testing are there?

There are two major types of drug testing as far as illicit drugs are concerned: workplace drug testing and roadside (or mobile) drug testing (RDT or MDT). Alcohol is tested for in random breath testing (RBT).

The rationale for workplace drug testing is that drug use impairs work performance (e.g., lowers productivity and increases accident risk) and employers need to do their best to reduce such risk. Drug testing is proposed as a way of preventing use and detecting impairment.

Roadside drug testing has been developed to deter those who have recently taken or used illicit drugs from driving. It is a saliva test and, if the driver is found to have the presence of an illicit drug in their system, they will receive a fine and possibly lose their licence (the penalties are different in each Australian state and territory).

Legal Disclaimer

The information provided on this fact sheet is provided for information purposes only. As such it **cannot substitute for the advice of a legal professional**

First published January 2015
Reviewed and updated January 2017

How long do drugs stay in your system?

How long do different drugs stay in your system?

It is extremely difficult to determine how long a particular drug will stay in your system. Drugs affect people in different ways and the time it takes an individual to excrete drug metabolites can depend on a number of factors. These include:

- **metabolism** – a fast metabolism means your body uses up things quickly – including food, water, and any drugs that you put into it. The slower your metabolism, the longer a drug might stay in your system. Unfortunately, there is no way of accurately knowing what type of metabolism you have
- **body mass** – an overweight person with more body fat may find it more difficult to excrete drugs (as the drug could linger in the fatty tissue), whilst a slimmer person with less body fat (and possibly a faster metabolism) may be able to get rid of the substances faster. Although there is science to support this, there are no guarantees that someone with a lower body mass is more likely to pass a drug test than a fatter person
- **amount and frequency of drug use and the types of drugs used** – this is probably the most important factor to consider, particularly in regards to cannabis. A one-time use of a drug might clear your system quickly, but using drugs on a regular basis can lead to the drug staying in your body for longer. The amount you take, over 'what' period of time can also be a factor

The time period in which a drug can be detected depends on the type of testing used. Hair testing can identify drugs that were taken months before. As a guide, the estimated time it would take for a number of illicit drugs to leave the body is shown below. The times provided are for urine tests, which is the most likely form of drug test:

- **amphetamines – 2 to 4 days**
- **cocaine – 2 to 4 days**
- **MDMA (ecstasy) – 2 to 5 days**
- **LSD – 1 to 4 days**

Cannabis is unique in that it is stored in the fatty tissues and released slowly into the bloodstream before it is excreted from your body. The length of time it stays in your system depends on many things but, in general, it can be found in urine for 1 to 5 days in occasional users and up to 6 weeks in regular, long-term users.

Can you flush drugs out of your system?

Drinking lots of water is sometimes promoted as a way of avoiding a positive urine drug test.

In some cases, it may have a small effect in as much as it can cause less concentrated urine. However, most urine tests check for 'dilution' of the specimen provided and reject the results because of this.

Drinking more water than your body can handle can be dangerous. If a person drinks too much water, their kidneys can't get rid of it quickly enough. This can cause headaches, cramps, convulsions and, in extreme cases, death.