Adolescence is the most likely time for someone to start taking drugs. Starting drug use as a teen can lead to drug problems when they grow up. Drug use causes changes to the brain, and the developing brains of young people are at special risk, including addiction.

**Teens and opioids**
Doctors prescribe opioids to treat severe pain for such medical conditions as dental surgery, serious sports injuries, or cancer. For most people, when opioids are taken as prescribed by their doctor for a short time, they are relatively safe and can reduce pain effectively. The risk of addiction increases when these medications are misused.

There have been news stories of teen athletes who are prescribed opioid medications for painful sports injuries, and eventually develop an addiction. If these teens experiencing addiction cannot get opioid pain pills, they may start using heroin.

**Teen behaviors that impact drug use**
For teens, the risk of drug abuse increases during times of change, such as moving to a new school, family disruptions such as divorce, or environmental factors such as a parent losing a job.

For the first time, young people may be exposed to substances that can be abused. They may find that drugs are easy to get, witness drug use by other teens, and attend activities where drugs are used. Some people may try drugs because they are curious.

Some teens may be pressured by friends to try drugs. Their sense of judgment and decision-making skills are not yet fully developed, so they may not understand the risks of drug use. It is normal for teens to want to try new things or take greater risks in life. Young people are more likely than most adults to engage in daring behaviors to impress their friends and to feel independent.

Adolescents are still at an early stage of development. They are at greater risk of misusing drugs or taking illegal drugs and addiction than the general public.
The parts of the brain that help us to understand new situations, make good decisions, and keep emotions and desires under control is not fully mature until adulthood.

So it is not surprising that young people who use drugs often have family and social problems, poor academic performance, health problems, and involvement with the legal system.

Drug use during adolescence may cause brain damage that can have serious, long-lasting health effects. Preventing young people from trying drugs can keep many people from ever becoming addicted to drugs.

People and their family members who are dealing with mental or substance use disorders, or both, can call the National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357. This is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service. It is available in English and Spanish. The National Helpline provides referrals to local treatment centers, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free brochures and other information.