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Music Lyrics Offer Earful About Drugs

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(WebMD) Teens tuned in to popular music are getting an earful about drinking, smoking, and using other drugs.

A new study shows that one-third of the most popular songs referred to alcohol, tobacco, or other substances.

The average teen listening to popular songs hears 84 daily references, 591 weekly references, and more than 30,700 yearly references in music to substance use, according to the study.

The University of Pittsburgh's Brian Primack, MD, EdM, and colleagues reviewed music lyrics for the 279 most popular pop, rock, rap, R&B/hip-hop, and country songs of 2005, according to *Billboard* magazine.

Of those songs:

- 24% referred to alcohol use
- 14% referred to marijuana use
- 12% referred to unspecified substances or drugs other than alcohol, marijuana, or tobacco
- 3% referred to tobacco

Many songs portrayed substance use positively.

Teens Under the Musical Influence?

Substance use was most frequently featured in rap music and most rarely portrayed in pop music. Country music played up humor in drinking songs.

"The average adolescent listening wholly to pop would be exposed to five references per day, whereas the average adolescent listening wholly to rap would be exposed to 251 references per day," Primack and colleagues write.

How does that music influence teens? This study didn't go there; it was all about lyrics, not teen behavior.

But the findings may inspire anti-drug messages for teens. For instance, the researchers suggest enlisting a rap artist to speak about the dangers of marijuana use, since marijuana is a common theme in rap music.

The study appears in the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine.

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