During adolescence, opportunities to experiment with alcohol and marijuana often emerge. Theories of adolescent substance use decision-making traditionally focus on the salience of social influences. For youth with chronic medical conditions, a group that currently comprises 20-26% of our nation’s youth, navigating these decisions is more complex. Substance use presents unique and serious risks of harm for these youth due to the potential for medication interactions, disease exacerbation, and treatment non-adherence.

### Objective

To deepen our understanding of youth with chronic medical conditions’ experiences and opinions of substance use and specify leverage points for preventive intervention grounded in their personal narratives.

### Methods

Qualitative interviews were undertaken with a purposively selected sample of youth ages 16-19 in subspecialty care for a chronic medical condition they had for at least a year. Youth were consented with a waiver of parental consent under the approval of the Boston Children’s Hospital IRB. Interviews were conducted in English over the phone using a semi-structured interview guide developed iteratively. Narrative data were audio-recorded, transcribed and thematically analyzed using an iterative inductive process.

### Site and Sample

Participants were 25 youth in subspecialty care at a large Northeastern urban teaching hospital of whom: 11 had a rheumatic disease, including 2 with IBD-associated arthritis; 4 had BD only; 9 had type 1 diabetes; and 1 had chronic persistent asthma. 14 were female.

### Findings

Four themes emerged around the topic of contextualizing, capturing, and influencing decision-making around substance use (Fig. 1).

- **Quality of life**: Having a chronic condition shapes how these youth approach and experience life, which provides a backdrop for decision-making.
- **Health consciousness**: For many youth with chronic conditions, their acute focus on health plays a central role in their decision-making around substance use (Table 1).
- **The adolescent context**: Additionally, social and developmental factors that characterize adolescence play into their motivations to use or not use substances.
- **Crafting a patient-centered conversation**: Youths are eager to have factual, non-judgmental clinical conversations about how substance use affects their condition.

### Conclusions

For youth with chronic medical conditions, their condition is a significant aspect of their life and identity that is considered when making decisions in all domains of life. For many, decisions around substance use are no exception. Youth in our sample report that health factors, in addition to the social, environmental and developmental factors that are common to all teens, weigh heavily in their substance use decisions. The close tie between the chronic condition and the decision to use substances speaks to the potential value of integrating the two topics in clinical conversations with these teens. The desire to be healthy and complication-free is a salient motivator for youth with chronic medical conditions, providing a point on which to anchor substance use prevention messages.

### Acknowledgments

Research reported in this poster was supported by NIAAA of the NIH under award # R01AA021913. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the NIH.