

Harm Reduction

This guide is focused reducing harm around use (something we don't talk about near enough). Whether you're reading for yourself, a loved one, or you're a professional in the field please don't skip this section...you may be in a position where these pragmatics save someone's life...and we can't get to recovery otherwise.

Do keep in mind that most of the resources are designed for readers in the U.S. You may live somewhere which much better access to these items or somewhere much worse.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR OVERALL SAFER USE:

- Make sure you eat and drink something before use. If you have snacks and water around for after use, you are also increasing your chances of remembering to stay hydrated and care for your body's nutritional needs.
- Make sure to rest. If you can sleep, do so. If you are too wired to sleep at least rest your body, Seriously, though. Many of the people who didn't need hospitalization for overdose immediately, ended up there later with hallucinations or aggressive behavior because they had no sleep on top of their use.
- Prepare for as many other safety needs around overdose, contamination, and infection based on your other needs (as discussed in more detail in the following sections).

LESSEN CHANCES OF OVERDOSE:

- Don't be alone. It is always safer to have someone with you that you trust. 90% of opioid overdoses occurred when the person using was alone. Make a use plan with that person, discussing what you are and are not comfortable with. Talk to them about the other harm reduction supplies you have on hand (more on these specifics throughout this section). If you aren't at home, plan for a safe way to get home (don't drive yourself if you're under the influence!). If you live in an area that has a safe use center, consider going there. If that is not available, please consider using the Lifeguard app. You set it up ahead of time with your phone number which allows you to be geolocated. You enter the drug you are using, and it sets a timer to check on you. If you can't respond, emergency services are deployed to your location.
- Don't presume your tolerance. Either based on the tolerance of people around you. Or on your previous tolerance if you haven't used in a while.

- Start with a lower, slower dose. You can build up if you feel you need more. If you are using a new substance or you haven't used in a while, use a slower method of use. Swallowing instead of injecting or inhaling, for example.
- Recognize signs of overdose. That way you can call emergency services for help if you notice the signs in yourself and anyone else around you that is using. Things like headaches, chest pain, seizures, delirium, agitation/anxiety, and problems breathing require emergency care.
- Get a naloxone kit and learn how to use it. Even if just from online articles and videos. Naloxone reverses an opioid overdose (heroin, fentanyl, codeine, etc.). Even if you think you are not taking an opioid, many other drugs are being cut with fentanyl which is a synthetic opioid that is cheap to make and is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. Fentanyl has been found in cocaine, ketamine, methamphetamines and other drugs tested across the US. Public health officials attribute fentanyl to the rise in drug related deaths during a time period where drug use is decreasing, and many states are increasing access to naloxone for just this reason. Read your state's access rules and find valuable resources about naloxone, including information about third party prescribing and standard prescription orders.

<https://www.safeproject.us/naloxone/awareness-project/state-rules/>

- Test your substances for fentanyl. Many states are moving to remove fentanyl test strips from their lists of illegal drug paraphernalia. You can search to see if they are available in your states, many harm reduction programs will provide them for free upon request. If you don't have them available in your area or want to purchase your own discreetly, they are only about a dollar a test strip. Keep in mind that the strips only indicate if fentanyl is present, not how much is present. Websites that provide them for safer use include:

<https://dancesafe.org/shop/>

<https://dosetest.com/product/fentanyl-test-strips/>

<https://bunkpolice.com/product/fentkit/>

- Don't mix substances. You could end up with a potentially dangerous interaction. This includes using alcohol and drugs together or drugs and prescription medications. Some common high-risk combos include benzodiazepines mixed with other depressants like alcohol, opioids, and GHB. Any depressant drugs shouldn't be mixed in general, as the effects of the combination on the central nervous system can impede brain function and halt your breathing. MDMA shouldn't be mixed with antidepressants (because the combo can cause serotonin syndrome, or any other drug that changes heart rate or blood pressure (meth, cocaine, and all sedatives). A great resource on cautions around mixing drugs, alcohol, and medications is:

<http://drugcocktails.ca>

PREVENTING INFECTION, CROSS- CONTAMINATION, STIS, PREGNANCY AND OTHER UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES:

- Use new equipment every time. Most larger cities now have needle exchange programs, which can make a huge difference in transmitting infections such as HIV and hepatitis. Clean supplies can also help lessen the chance of spreading other bacteria that could be on the cooker, in the water, etc. The following website maintains a database of sites across the US that offer needles, gloves, and other supplies. Many of these agencies also offer medical care, should that be a current need.

<https://www.nasen.org/>

You can also order supplies from this harm reduction site:

<https://nextdistro.org/>

- Along with using clean supplies, wash your hands and use an alcohol pad to wipe down your skin before injecting. It's also important to rotate your injection sites and take care of your skin where it has been pierced, giving it time to heal.
- Don't skin pop instead! Skin popping (injecting under your skin instead of into a vein) leads to a high chance of developing an abscess.
- If you inject your drugs through your anal cavity (booty bumping or boofing), it is far less damaging to your body to mix your drugs with water first and insert them with a clean syringe (NEEDLE REMOVED THO) or a lube injector with a little bit of lubricant on the tip. Lie on your side and keep hold of the end of the injector so it doesn't get lost up in there.
- If you smoke crack cocaine, wrap the end of your pipe with tape or use a rubber holder so you don't burn your lips. Additionally, use a brillo as a filer or a wire screen so you don't accidentally inhale hot particles. And let the pipe cook down between hits.
- If you snort, don't share straws (or rolled up paper or whatever) since this is another way to transmit infections.
- If you like to have sex when using, prepare ahead of time as much as possible. If you are capable of getting pregnant, consider going on a longer term form of birth control that doesn't require daily pills (like an IUD or an Levonorgestrel-releasing implant).

- You can also reduce the risk of pregnancy and STIs by using barrier methods such as external and internal condoms, dams, gloves, and lubricant either from: state and municipal health departments, family planning clinics, colleges and universities, some high schools, and other prevention based agencies. Two places to help you either find these items that you can pick up locally or have mailed to you are.

<https://condomfinder.org/>

<https://www.goodrx.com/health-topic/sexual-health/free-condoms>

Do make sure that if you are using lubricant with your silicone barrier method, make sure it isn't oil based. And if you don't have a sex dam available, sarah wrap works just fine (though it does NOT work as a condom).

- Also consider getting on PrEP (PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) which is very effective in preventing HIV. If you are not on PrEP and have an exposure, you can also look into getting PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis), which is a 28-day prescription treatment that you must start as soon as possible, and within a 72 hour window of exposure. Many community clinics and HIV prevention programs provide both PrEP (as a pill or injectable) and PEP at no charge. You can also utilize the Health and Human Services program in the US to pay for the medication by getting the prescription written by any provider by enrolling at:

[http:// readysprep.hiv.gov](http://readysprep.hiv.gov)

or calling (855) 447-8410

- If you end up having unprotected sex and can get pregnant, you can take a morning-after contraception pill (often referred to as Plan B). Like PEP, morning-after contraception needs to be taken as soon as possible and within 72 hours of having had sex. Morning after pills can be found at most pharmacies and superstores that have a family planning section. They are also on websites such as Amazon and cost about ten dollars. You may be able to access it from your local community health clinic or family planning clinic. Do keep in mind that if you weigh over 165 pounds, the brand Ella will be more effective.
- If you do find out you are pregnant and don't want to be, if it is still under ten weeks you may be able to access a medication abortion. Information on doing so (including information on accessing the medication in states that have banned it can be found at):

<http://plancpills.org/find-pills>

- If it is past the ten-week window and you live in state that has made abortion illegal, information on finding a safe and legal abortion elsewhere can be found here:

<https://www.abortionfinder.org/abortion-guides-by-state>