

Harm reduction for drug users



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In Northern Ireland, 3 out of 4 drug-related deaths involve more than one drug or a combination of one or more drugs and alcohol. In many cases, prescription drugs (for example diazepam or tramadol) are involved.

In the UK in 2012, 251 new psychoactive substances were identified and new drugs are being identified at a rate of around one per week. These are not controlled in any way, and you can never know what you are taking. The only way to avoid all the risks is to not take any drugs which are not prescribed for you by your doctor.

However, if you do choose to take drugs, the advice below may help reduce the risks for you.

This is intended to be general advice, and does not relate to any specific drug or type of drug. It has been informed by the experiences of drug users.

Preparing to take drugs

- **The only way to avoid all the risks is to not take any drugs which are not prescribed for you.** Think carefully about the risks before you start, especially if you have (or have had in the past) mental health problems – as using any drugs you have not been prescribed can



Mixing drugs

Mixing any drug with another drug increases the risk of dangerous side effects. This includes alcohol. Some drugs are especially risky to mix. This includes:

- cocaine and alcohol;
- opioids (such as heroin or morphine) and downers (such as benzos), alcohol or other opioids such as tramadol.

Prescription drugs which are highly likely to cause serious side effects when taken along with an illegal drug or drugs include:

- painkillers (such as morphine, oxycodone, co-codamol, tramadol);
- antidepressants (fluoxetine/Prozac, amitriptyline);
- tranquilisers and sleepers (diazepam, nitrazepam, phenazepam);
- drugs normally used for epilepsy and nerve pain such as Lyrica/pregabalin

Taking drugs

- **Start low and go slow**, especially if you are taking a drug you have never used before. Take a small amount at first and let it reach its peak effect to test how strong it is.



that you are there to help. If they are breathing normally encourage them to put themselves into the recovery position or at least to keep still.

If you experience any worrying symptoms, contact the hospital Emergency Department as soon as possible. The sooner you present to the Emergency Department, the greater the likelihood that any treatment will be successful

Coming down

- Try to avoid taking other drugs to help you come down as these could prolong the come down or even cause overdose.
- Go somewhere you feel safe to relax and keep numbers of people you can talk to in your phone if you start to feel depressed, frightened or unwell.
- Some people experience suicidal thoughts and feelings after taking drugs, especially after a binge. If you are concerned about yourself or another user, make sure you talk to someone like a GP, addiction service or mental health service immediately. Lifeline counsellors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to listen in confidence. **Contact Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.**



and Information System at damis@hscni.net. This information will be treated in confidence and will be used only to warn other drug users.

