



Harm Minimisation: Drugs

It is important to remember that the best way to avoid harms from using drugs is not to use them at all, however, if you choose to use drugs, you can also make some important choices to minimise the possible harm associated with your drug use.

All drug use, whether it is legal, illegal or pharmaceutical drug use, entails some degree of risk. However, some people are prone to greater risks when using illicit drugs. Avoid using drugs if you have a family history of, or suffer from, a medical condition such as diabetes, heart or blood pressure problems, epilepsy, kidney disease, a mental health problem or if you are pregnant. Similarly, if you are taking any medications to treat, for example, blood pressure, weight loss or depression, you should avoid using other drugs altogether.

Harm-reduction strategies are designed to reduce the impacts of drug-related harm on individuals and communities. Below are some ideas that may assist you and your friends to keep safe.

Harm reduction strategies

Transport

Planning your night out is a really important factor in keeping you and your friends safe. Planning to use public transport is a cheap way to get you home safely. Being under the influence of drugs whilst driving can affect your judgment and/or cause you to take more risks. It is not only unsafe but illegal to drive under the influence of drugs. If police suspect you have used drugs they can arrest and drug test you.

Buying taxi vouchers, pre-paid bus tickets, or travel tens and keeping these in your purse or wallet is a great way to ensure you get home safely, especially if you find you have no cash to get home at the end of the night.

Money

So you don't end up spending your week's cash all in one 'big night out' it can be useful to leave credit cards and other ATM cards at home. Sometimes it can be tempting to splurge when you are under the influence of the drug you have taken.

Re Balance Your Lifestyle

Sex

Be prepared as impaired judgment can lead to unsafe or unwanted sex. For this reason always be prepared and carry condoms or dams. Remember, you need protection with oral sex as well. If you keep a condom and/or dams in your wallet or handbag, remember to check the expiry date every so often. Remember to use condoms and dams during oral sex as well as intercourse.

Doctor

Look after your general health and see your GP regularly for checkups. This may include seeing your dentist for check ups every six months as people who use drugs may grind their teeth.

Look after your body. Make sure you eat well and/or take multivitamins and get plenty of sleep and exercise so you have a good level of general health.

Safety

When using drugs try not to use alone, because if anything should happen to you, your friend will be there to help you and vice versa. Also, stay together with your friends or at least know each others' whereabouts for safety reasons.

Emergency

Know what to do in case of an overdose or if a friend is unconscious. Do not leave friends to 'sleep it off'. If a friend is unconscious place your friend in the recovery position, lay them on their side and check them regularly. Don't be afraid to call an ambulance. Dial 000 or 112 from a mobile.

Use only a small amount of the drug to test purity/strength of the drug as once you have taken too much of a drug the only thing that will make you feel better is time.

Signs of dehydration or over-heating

Signs of dehydration or over-heating include feeling very hot, confused and not well, developing a headache or throwing up. Not being able to wee or if it is dark in colour may also be a sign of dehydration. Being unable to slow your heart rate while you're chilling out may also be a sign.

Be aware that alcohol and other drinks that contain stimulants such as coffee and energy drinks dehydrate you, so it's best to avoid these and stick to water.

Re Balance Your Lifestyle

Cocaine and amphetamines

If you are snorting drugs such as cocaine and amphetamines, do not share snorting equipment. Hepatitis C, a blood borne virus that can affect the liver and cause other health problems can be passed on by sharing this equipment. If you are snorting cocaine and amphetamines, rotate the use of your nostrils and try not to line up on any available surface. This includes surfaces that may have germs such as toilet seats. Sometimes amphetamines and cocaine can be cut with agents that are not meant to be snorted. Give your nostrils a break and use other methods such as dissolving the drug into water and drinking it, rubbing it into your gums or placing it under the tongue to be dissolved and absorbed into the body. If you get a sinus infection, seek treatment early.

Ecstasy

Ecstasy can be unpredictable as some of the chemicals needed to make it can be difficult to source, so other chemicals are often used as substitutes. Try to use the same dealer so the purity/strength remains fairly consistent. Take half a pill to gauge the effects of the drug. Always remember signs of dehydration and suggested water intake.

Water Intake: Drink 500mls an hour if active, 250mls if not active

These simple ideas can minimize some of the harms associated with drug use. Be creative. Do some simple planning to ensure you and your friends remain as safe as possible. If you would like to discuss harm reduction strategies, want some education or feel like your drug use is out of control or causing problems you can contact Manly Drug Education and Counselling Centre (MDECC) on 9977 0711.