

## Patient information factsheet

# Recreational drugs: Safety advice to reduce harm after leaving hospital

After you leave hospital, your risk of having an overdose after taking recreational drugs is higher than normal. This is because your tolerance to drugs will have reduced while you were in hospital (even if you have used drugs during your stay in hospital or we have given you substitute drugs to help with withdrawal symptoms or ease pain).

This factsheet contains important safety information about taking recreational drugs after leaving hospital. We hope it helps to answer some of your questions. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact a support service using the details at the end of this factsheet.

### How to stay safe when buying or taking recreational drugs

- Try and buy from a source that you trust. Please be aware of the unpredictable nature of street drugs and drugs bought over the internet (these may contain other substances).
- Avoid injecting drugs into your body (smoke them if possible). Injecting the right dose is difficult, especially for first time users and injecting opioids carries greater risks.
- Start with a small dose (start low and go slow).
- Tell someone you are with what drug you have taken.
- Avoid mixing drugs, especially with alcohol.
- Try to use drugs with trusted friends in a safe environment, especially if it is your first time taking drugs.
- Carry naloxone (the emergency antidote for overdoses caused by heroin and other opioids) if you have had training and give it in an emergency.
- Don't be afraid of seeking help and being honest about what you have taken.
- Look after your friends. If you are not able to wake them after they have taken drugs, put them in the recovery position and immediately call **999** for an ambulance. Use naloxone if you suspect opioids are involved.

For more information about the recovery position, please visit:

[www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/first-aid/recovery-position](http://www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/first-aid/recovery-position)

### Depressants (for example, benzodiazepines and GHB)

- Doses vary. Always test a small amount first (especially for GHB and GBL).
- Stay hydrated (with non-alcoholic drinks, such as water) and have something to eat both before and while taking depressants.
- Do not mix with other depressants (for example, alcohol and GHB), as this can increase the risk of side effects and can potentially lead to respiratory depression (a condition where breathing is too slow or shallow, leading to a buildup of carbon dioxide in the blood and a shortage of oxygen) and death.

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- To avoid having a 'spiked' drink (a drink that contains alcohol or drugs without you knowing or agreeing), do not accept a drink unless you have seen it being prepared and never leave your drink unattended.
- If you think you have been 'spiked', stay with a trusted friend (not someone you have just met) and go to a safe place (your home, or a nearby hospital or police station).

## **Stimulants (for example, cocaine and ecstasy)**

- Always wait at least two hours after taking these drugs before taking any more.
- Avoid mixing with other drugs, especially alcohol.
- Drink small sips of non-alcoholic drinks (for example, water or isotonic drinks), but don't drink more than one pint in one hour.
- Take regular breaks from dancing.
- Avoid using stimulants if you have:
  - high blood pressure
  - heart disease
  - epilepsy (a condition that affects your brain and causes seizures)
  - psychiatric problems like depression or anxiety.

## **Hallucinogens (for example, LSD and magic mushrooms)**

- If you find or fear you are experiencing a 'bad trip', find a place you feel safe and remember it will pass.
- Single doses can vary even in visually identical samples.
- Take these drugs with people you know and trust around you (ideally with someone who isn't using) or at least make sure someone knows where you are.
- Try not to get overstimulated after taking hallucinogens. It is easy to get dehydrated after taking hallucinogens (for example, if you go dancing for hours), and anxiety can sometimes set in, causing a potential increase in paranoid ideation (persistent thoughts of suspicion and distrust).

## **Opioids (for example, heroin and morphine)**

- It is easy to get the dose wrong and the biggest risk of taking opioids is overdose.
- Smoking opioids is safer than injecting or snorting them.
- Always have naloxone with you.
- Do not mix opioids with other depressants (such as alcohol, benzodiazepines or barbiturates).
- Make sure you are in a safe environment with trusted people when taking opioids, as they can make you less aware of your own actions and those around you.

## **New psychoactive substances (NPS) (for example, legal highs, black mamba and annihilation)**

- Always take a small test dose first and then wait at least two hours before taking more.
- Don't mix with other drugs.
- Try to check drug forums before taking these types of drugs to get a better idea of other users' experiences of dosages (some drugs are extremely powerful).

## **Alcohol and drug support services**

The alcohol and drug support services on the next page can offer advice and support to help you cut down or stop taking recreational drugs.

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## Local contacts

Change Grow Live Southampton (for anyone living in Southampton City)

Telephone: **023 8071 7171** (Monday to Friday, hours vary)

Email: [southampton@cgl.org.uk](mailto:southampton@cgl.org.uk)

Website: [www.changegrowlive.org/drug-alcohol-service-southampton](http://www.changegrowlive.org/drug-alcohol-service-southampton)

Location: 50-52 London Road, Southampton, SO15 2AH

Inclusion Hampshire (for anyone living in Hampshire)

Telephone: **0300 124 0103** (Monday to Friday, hours vary)

Email: [inclusionadmin@mpft.nhs.uk](mailto:inclusionadmin@mpft.nhs.uk)

Website: [www.inclusionhants.org](http://www.inclusionhants.org)

Location: Various locations in Hampshire

## National contacts

Frank

Telephone: **0300 123 6600** or text **82111** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Website: [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

Narcotics Anonymous (UKNA)

Website: [www.ukna.org](http://www.ukna.org)

NHS

Website: [www.nhs.uk/live-well/addiction-support/drug-addiction-getting-help](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/addiction-support/drug-addiction-getting-help)

NHS England

Website: [www.england.nhs.uk/supporting-our-nhs-people/support-now/substance-misuse-and-gambling-support](http://www.england.nhs.uk/supporting-our-nhs-people/support-now/substance-misuse-and-gambling-support)

Information adapted from Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust's 'Harm reduction for opiate drug use - Advice on discharge from hospital' leaflet with permission.

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **PFSH@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **[www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport)**

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