

Questions about
**INJECTING
DRUGS**

and the answers that may
SURPRISE YOU

A harm reduction booklet for people
who want to keep themselves safe



HARM REDUCTION IS ALL AROUND US!

MOST RISK



Getting on a motorcycle with **no protection**

helmet,
jacket,
gloves,
etc...

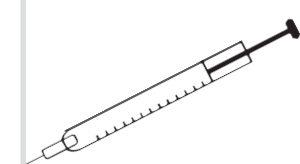


Getting on a motorcycle with **protection**



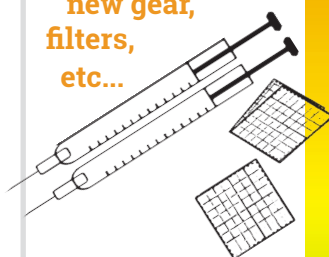
Consider
walking
instead

LIKELY SAFEST



Injecting drugs with **no protection**

alcohol swabs,
new gear,
filters,
etc...



Injecting drugs with **protection**

read on for ideas
to protect yourself...






Consider avoiding
drugs or using
non-injection
methods



THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE UGLY OF INJECTING DRUGS

Drugs can affect you in different ways.

<i>THE GOOD</i> Positive Effects (up)	<i>THE BAD</i> Negative Effects (down)
more energy	can't sleep for days
feel "on top of the world"	crash when it wears off
escape from problems	need drug to feel normal

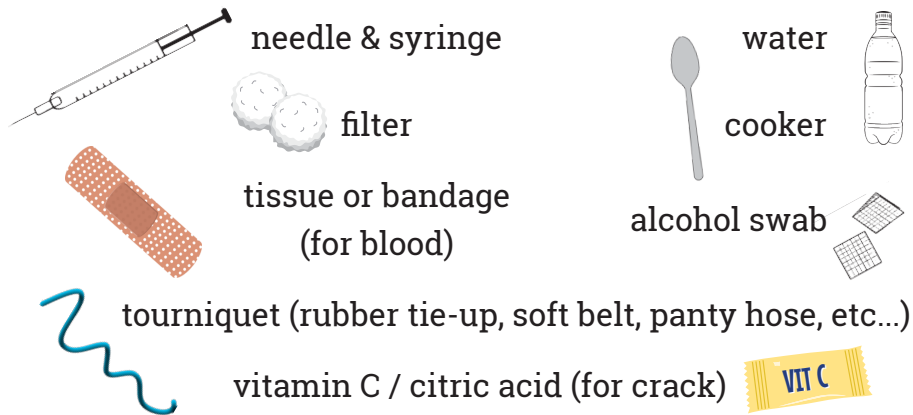
<i>THE UGLY</i>	
	Infections: skin (abscess), blood, heart, bones, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis (liver infection)
	Hospital stay: may need months in hospital to feel better and get rid of some infections
	Overdose: stop breathing, heart attack, seizures, death
	Damage: vein injury, blood clots, loss of limb
	Violence: loss of relationships & housing

Harm reduction uses practical ideas and strategies to reduce the downside of risky activities.

HOW CAN I KEEP GERMS & INFECTIONS OUT OF MY BODY?

USE NEW SUPPLIES (YOUR WORKS), EVERY TIME

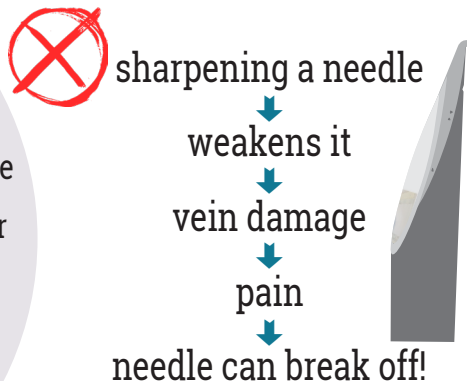
Before starting, have ready:



You may be able to find these items (sometimes free) from a harm reduction service, a pharmacy or clinic in your area.

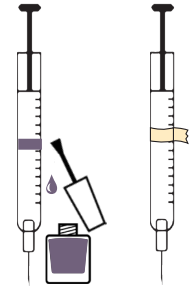
Can't find new and plan to reuse your own?

Rinse your needle and syringe with **COLD WATER** right after use. Cold prevents leftover blood from clotting inside.



NEVER SHARE YOUR EQUIPMENT

MARK your syringes (rigs) so you know which are yours. May use tape or nail polish to identify your equipment.



Always **WASH HANDS** with soap and water and **CLEAN SKIN** with alcohol swab (then let skin dry) right before injecting.

DIVIDE shared drug **BEFORE** cooking.



COOK your drug - heat each wash until it bubbles (~10 seconds) and let it cool before injecting.

FLAG each time - pull plunger back to get blood so you know you are in the vein.

THROW AWAY - put used supplies into a hard-sided container with a lid (e.g. pop bottle) or a sharps container.

One person's story... in their own words...

My parents right now are sober - but as a child, things were different. My dad is an addict, and my mother is an alcoholic, so **I had a pretty rough childhood**. On my 14th birthday, I ran away and never went back. I moved in with people who had me doing crime at night - stealing whatever I could. By the time I was 15... I was introduced to cocaine, and by the time I was 18, I was in and out of jail. I think I spent 5 years in jail all together and it was all drug-related - it was my addiction.

When I was 21, I went to my first recovery house and I got clean for over a month. That was my **first little bit of sobriety**. I was always chasing it after that. **I wanted to quit**, and I went to different recovery houses and detoxes but I never was able to get sober because the detoxes were really short, like one week or a couple days. It's really hard for somebody to stop the addiction, find a job, move forward and get all this stuff together in a week.

THE POWER OF ADDICTION IS SO STRONG.

It's very hard to get out of. You could have put \$100,000 in front of me and said it was mine if I quit - I still wouldn't have quit.

I was using hard drugs for 20 years. I felt like the worst person in the world. Like, "I haven't showered in three days, I live on the street, I steal chocolate bars just to get crack ..." It's a downward spiral. I was upset with my life.

Then I found Onsite (in Vancouver) and there, you can stay as long as you want. I had been depressed, felt suicidal, was a criminal and I had no people skills or life skills. They gave me all the time I needed to get my life in order - I did counselling, massages even.

They took the time to help me get a job and housing and everything. They said, "we know you want to get cleaner now, so if you do slip, it's okay, we're not going to kick you out - just be honest with us". So, they had this **feeling of being safe there** - I can remember the feeling. They were actually there to really help you.

My doctor put me on Suboxone. The first day sucked, but the second day they doubled my dose and when I woke up - I felt like a new person.

It was like a feeling of hope in your bones.

I have not touched opiates in five years now - nothing! You start getting things back over time. Your bicycle, your car, your girlfriend, your dog. I'm foreman at my company now. There are some amazing people out there who are stuck. I can't make them change. But once you get the Suboxone in you ... it just takes a little push after that.

Away you go.

YOU CAN RECOVER.

NOT READY TO QUIT YET?

Try to get on a drug program, so you don't have to worry about money every day to support your habit and you can keep it legal.

Go to a supervised consumption site, use the needle exchange, get free needles.

Don't pick up a needle off the street and use it or share one with someone you don't know. No matter how sick you are, don't shoot it in your arm. It's very dangerous.

WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE TO PROTECT MY VEINS?

KNOW YOUR SITES

PLANNING WHERE TO HIT THE VEIN CAN:

- prevent scarring, help your veins last longer
- prevent problems like collapsed veins, abscesses, dangerous bleeding or clots, & loss of your arm/leg

Learn to inject yourself with both hands so you are in control and can rotate between different sites.

CHOOSING A SAFER INJECTION SITE

Avoid dangerous **RED** areas, like the neck, inner wrist, and groin

This information was provided by CATIE (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange). For more information, contact CATIE at 1.800.263.1638 or info@catie.ca.

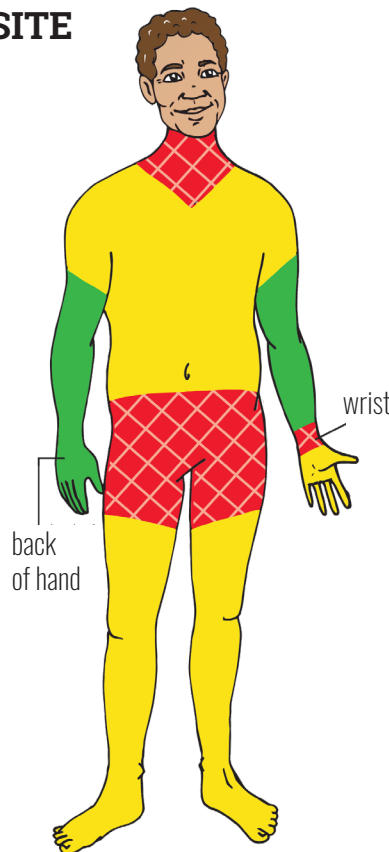
If you are injecting drugs:

Green areas are safer.

Try to avoid the yellow areas.

Red areas are dangerous.

A local harm reduction program can often teach you how to inject



PLUMP VEINS ARE WORKING VEINS

- drink plenty of water
- a warm cloth can bring them out
- never inject in the bath – you could drown
- inject slowly in small veins
- tie up, not too tight, with something easy to open
- dissolve drug fully, then cool, to avoid the wax/filler in tablets



"SAVE" ONE GOOD SPOT FOR EMERGENCY USE

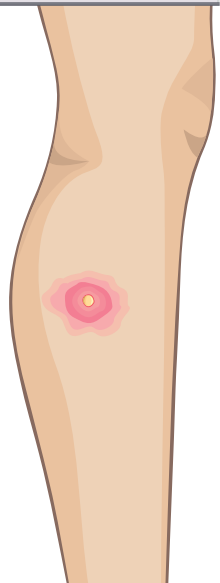
GET HELP FOR YOUR ABSCESS

A POCKET OF PUS UNDER THE SKIN

- could look like a red, warm, sore raised area of the skin
- drainage could smell bad

DON'T: drain it yourself, pick at it, or wrap it in paper towel

DO: keep it clean & dry, see a health care provider - they might be able to drain it; take antibiotics if prescribed



CHECK THIS OUT:

www.catie.ca/en/resources/choosing-safer-injection-site

HOW CAN I AVOID OVERDOSING?

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DIE IF YOU GET HIGH

- don't use alone: have someone who cares about you around
- use at a supervised consumption site if available
- take a test dose: strength & pureness of drug can change, especially if recently without (detox, jail, etc)

CARRY NALOXONE (NARCAN®):

- ➔ can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose
- ➔ helps a person keep breathing until support arrives
- ➔ even if you use crystal meth or cocaine, opioids might be mixed in
- ➔ do not be afraid to use it – you can't hurt someone with naloxone
- ➔ call for help - The Good Samaritan Overdose Act protects from simple possession charges
- ➔ make sure others around you know how to use it to save you if you need it



ONE PERSON'S EXPERIENCE...

"I got what I thought was cocaine. To make sure I wasn't getting ripped off, I put the tiniest bit you can imagine in water and I tried it. I remember taking two steps and the next thing I know I'm in the middle of the street with an ambulance. Turns out it was fentanyl. I was very lucky that I happened to be stumbling out of an alley when I overdosed. The paramedics gave me three shots of Narcan ... and serious CPR because my chest hurt for a week after. Two people took the same stuff as me and died."

You don't see it coming. You're not like "Oh, I'm going to overdose" or "Oh, I think I'm going under". You're just walking along and the next thing you know, WHAM. **It's ideal for people to have Narcan kits** because if you see a friend overdosing you can smash them with it. That may save their life."

SICK & TIRED OF FEELING SICK & TIRED?

It can be dangerous to try and quit drugs all at once or "cold turkey".



If you use opioids, treatment with methadone or buprenorphine can be an option: reduces cravings, withdrawals, and other opioid use

Your body gets a "rest" from the daily grind of trying to find more drug.

Being able to talk with someone can help - consider talking with a local peer support program or counsellor.

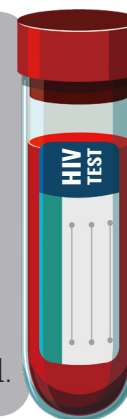
ONE PERSON'S OWN WORDS ON FINDING SUCCESS...

*"I wanted to go cold turkey. I had tried multiple times and I was going to do it again. I thought about trying Kadian or methadone again but my doctor talked me into Suboxone. I tried it and the first day was rough but the second day, I tell you it was like, **"Wow!"** Not only do you feel better but it's like an antidepressant. So, all of the sudden **I had a little bit of hope** - the relief, the difference it made. Nothing else worked for me, but **those pills changed it from almost impossible to very easy.**"*

OTHER TIPS TO REDUCE RISK

GET TESTED for HIV and HEP C at least every year (more often if sharing supplies)

- 1 out of 7 people with HIV don't know they have it
- a positive isn't a death sentence
- with treatment, you can live a full life and prevent infecting others. Hep C can even be cured.



GET VACCINES

- prevent hepatitis A and B and tetanus
- talk to your care provider about what is available to you

LOOK INSIDE FOR:

- Tips you can consider to help make **YOU** and **OTHERS AROUND YOU** safer. You can start (or restart) these strategies anytime.
- A personal account of one person's journey with injecting drugs

YOU ARE THE EXPERT ON YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE

If you inject drugs, there are steps you can take to make it safer.
EVERY ACTION COUNTS!

Which things in this booklet might
make sense for you to do today?

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