Questions about INJECTING DRUGS and the answers that may SURPRISE YOU

A HARM REDUCTION booklet for people who want to keep themselves safe

Funding for the creation and printing of this booklet was supported by Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program. This booklet represents the views of RxFiles Academic Detailing, and not necessarily the views of Health Canada.

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

USE NEW GEAR EVERY TIME

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

**BEFORE STARTING, HAVE READY:**

- Rig: needle & syringe
- Water
- Filter
- Cooker
- Alcohol swab
- Tie: a tourniquet, such as a soft belt
- Bandage (if needed for blood)
- Vitamin C (for dissolving crack)

NEVER SHARE YOUR EQUIPMENT

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

**NEVER SHARE YOUR EQUIPMENT**

- MARK your syringes (rigs) so you know which are yours. Some people use tape or nail polish for this.

**NEVER SHARE YOUR EQUIPMENT**

- DIVIDE shared drug BEFORE cooking.

**NEVER SHARE YOUR EQUIPMENT**

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

**NEVER SHARE YOUR EQUIPMENT**

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

**NEVER SHARE YOUR EQUIPMENT**

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

Never clean, sharpen, or reuse your rigs.
**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

Learn how to inject yourself with either hand 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.

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.

This information was provided by CATIE. For more information, visit [www.catie.ca](http://www.catie.ca).

**PLUMP VEINS ARE WORKING VEINS**

- Drink plenty of water
- A warm cloth can bring veins out
- Never inject in the bath – you could drown
- Inject slowly in small veins

- Tie up, not too tight, with something easy to untie
- Dissolve all the drug, then cool, to avoid the wax/filler in tablets

**“SAVE” ONE SPOT FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL USE**

**GET HELP WITH AN ABSCESS**

**A POCKET OF PUS UNDER THE SKIN:**
- Could look like a red, warm, sore raised area of the skin
- Could smell bad

- **DON’T:** drain it yourself, pick at it, or wrap it in paper towel
- **DO:** keep it clean & dry
- **DO:** see a health care provider - they might be able to drain it and prescribe antibiotics if needed

**MORE INFO CAN BE FOUND HERE:**
HARM REDUCTION IS ALL AROUND US
Different things we do can range in safety.

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<th>RISKIER</th>
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<td>Getting on a motorcycle with no protection</td>
<td>Helmet, jacket, gloves, etc...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Injecting drugs with no protection</td>
<td>New gear: rigs, cookers, filters, ties, etc...</td>
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<th>EVEN SAFER</th>
<th>Consider reducing drug use or using non-injection methods</th>
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<td>Biking/ walking instead</td>
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HARM REDUCTION USES PRACTICAL IDEAS AND STRATEGIES TO INCREASE YOUR SAFETY

INJECTING DRUGS WITH PROTECTION CAN HELP PREVENT...

- Infections
- Overdose
- Vein or limb damage
- Long hospital stays
- Violence or loss of relationships
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 near
- Use at a supervised consumption site if available
- START LOW AND GO SLOW: take a test dose, especially if recently without (in detox, jail, hospital, etc...)

CARRY NALOXONE (NARCAN®)
It can reverse an opioid/“down” overdose.

NALOXONE

“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 naloxone ... 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 naloxone kits because if you see a friend overdosing you can smash them with it. That may save their life.”

- Tom. See page 10 for Tom’s story.

SICK & TIRED OF FEELING SICK & TIRED?

It can be risky to try and quit drugs all at once or “cold turkey”.

If you want to quit or cut down on use, seek help. Talking with a local peer support program or mental health counsellor can help you connect with other supports in your area.

If you use opioids (“down”), treatment with methadone or buprenorphine (like Suboxone®) can help reduce cravings, withdrawals and other opioid (“down”) use.

“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.”

- Tom. See page 10 for Tom’s story.

OTHER TIPS TO REDUCE RISK

GET TESTED for HIV and HEP C every 6-12 months (more often if pregnant)
- 1 out of 7 people with HIV in Canada don’t know they have it.
- Getting HIV or Hep C isn’t a death sentence. When treated, Hep C is often cured.
- With treatment, you can live a full life and prevent infecting others.

GET VACCINES
- Prevent hepatitis A and B and tetanus.
- Talk to your care provider about what is available to you.
One person’s story...

**TOM’S STORY**

Tom’s name has been changed to protect his identity.

“My parents right now are sober - but as a child, things were different. My dad used drugs and my mother was addicted to alcohol, 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 altogether and it was all drug-related - it was my addiction.

When I was 21, I went to my first recovery house and I was sober 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, including opioids/‘down’, 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 was a downward spiral. I was upset with my life.

**FINDING ACCEPTANCE & SUPPORT...**

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 use less 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 me.

**GETTING ON TREATMENT...**

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 my bones.

I have not touched opioids after being on Suboxone for five years now – nothing! I started getting things back. My bicycle, my car, my girlfriend, my 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 I got the Suboxone in me ... it just took a little push after that. Away I went.”

One person’s story...

**in their own words...**
LOOK INSIDE FOR:

Tips you can consider to help make YOU and OTHERS AROUND YOU safer. You can start (or restart) these strategies anytime.

YOU ARE THE EXPERT ON YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE

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

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