

Staying alive

**If you inject
heroin or
other opiates**

read this booklet!



**In the UK over 100
people die from
a drugs overdose
every month. And
many of their deaths
could be prevented.**

**Don't let it happen
to you, or the people
you care about.**

Read this booklet. **Talk to
your local drugs service**
about overdose.

Many local drugs services
run **training courses** on how
to deal with overdose and
how to give first aid.

Are you at risk?

Do you ever:

- inject heroin?
- drink alcohol or take downers (such as valium) on the same day as opiates (such as heroin or methadone)?
- mix heroin and cocaine or crack?
- use a lot of heroin, crack, cocaine or speed?
- take a break from opiates, and then go back?

Have you:

- been injecting heroin for a long time?
- gone over a few times in the recent past?

Are you:

- feeling down, depressed or anxious as well as using opiates, downers, crack or cocaine?

If you answered **'yes'** to any of these questions, you could be at risk of overdose.

“I remember this one time. I did a hit with two other people. Next thing I knew I was coming round. Hours had gone by. It was dark outside. I realised I’d gone over. The people I was with had just walked out.

I saw one of them a few weeks later. He was surprised to see me.

He said, ‘Last time I saw you, you were going blue!’ I don’t blame him for walking out. It was my responsibility, and I was taking stupid risks.

Why should he give a shit about my life if I don’t?”

Overdose risks

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Know the risks

**Most people who overdose
know a lot about drugs.
But they don't always realise
the risks they are taking.**

Injecting

People who inject are much more likely to overdose.

Smoking or chasing is a much safer bet.

Don't inject.

If you do, don't do it alone.

Mixing depressants

(like heroin, methadone, benzos and alcohol)

Most overdoses happen when people have more than one depressant drug like alcohol, valium, temazepam, methadone and/or heroin in their system at the same time.

Don't mix depressants.

Being older

Deaths from heroin overdose can happen at any age.

But most deaths from heroin overdose happen to people over 25 who have been using (especially injecting) for a few years.

Think about methadone treatment. It can seriously reduce your risk of overdose.

Low tolerance

Your tolerance to heroin and other opiates builds up quite slowly. But if you stop using for a week or so, it drops right down again. So a dose which would have been OK a week or two ago, could kill you now.

**Make this promise to yourself:
“if I use heroin again, I’ll chase
until I’ve got a tolerance.”**

Methadone

Many methadone-related overdoses happen to people who buy methadone from someone in treatment.

Often they don't realise that their tolerance is completely different from the person they've bought it from.

Stimulants

Research suggests you are over 20 times more likely to have a heart attack in the hour after taking cocaine or crack. If you use regularly, you can develop heart problems without realising it – especially if you also use alcohol. Eventually, this can cause heart attacks or strokes – the most common cause of death in a stimulant overdose.

Get your heart checked out.

Feeling down

Feelings of depression can creep up on you.

You can lose hope that things will change – or even stop caring whether you live or die. If this rings a bell with you, don't give up hope.

**Talk about how you're feeling
– and try to get help.**

Not knowing what to do

There are usually people around when someone overdoses. But often, they don't know what to do. Make sure you – and the people around you – are prepared.

Ask your local drugs service about first aid training. And ask if they also provide the heroin antidote, naloxone.

What you **know**
and what you **do**
about overdose
could make the
difference between
life and death.

“I remember giving this guy a small hit just to tide him over. He overdosed on it.
I couldn't believe it.

His heart was beating but he'd stopped breathing.

I knew mouth to mouth.

So I breathed for him for half an hour. He just suddenly came round.

I don't know why, but I burst into tears.

I suppose it was just that I could feel the life going back to him. I never thought I'd experience something like that.”

Overdose signs and responses

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**Overdose training
can save lives**

Prepare yourself

**If you spend time with
people who use heroin,
you have to face the fact
that you could witness
a life or death situation.**

The best way to prepare yourself is by:

- knowing the risks and signs
- talking to your local drugs service about overdose
- learning how to deal with overdose.

Find out if first aid training for overdose is available locally.

Overdose signs:

Depressants

(heroin, methadone,
benzos, alcohol)

Moderate: uncontrollable nodding, can't focus eyes, slurred speech, pale skin.

Serious: awake but can't talk.

Severe: snoring, erratic or shallow breathing, vomiting, turning blue, problems breathing, not breathing, choking or gurgling.

Overdose signs:

Stimulants

(crack, coke, speed)

Moderate: paranoia, pale skin, clammy skin, clenched jaws, aggression, the shakes, very fast pulse.

Serious: blurred vision, sweating, diarrhoea, pressure or tightness in the chest, dizziness, difficulty with talking or walking, becoming violent.

Severe: chest pain, fitting, collapse.

Signs of overdose

You need to know if they are unconscious. You can find this out by tapping and gently shaking them by the shoulders while calling out their name.

If you can't wake them or they are showing other signs of unconsciousness such as:

- **snoring deeply;**
- **turning blue;** or
- **not breathing;**

Don't panic.

What you need to do

1. **Put them in the recovery position.**
2. **Dial 999 and ask for an ambulance.**
3. **Stay with them until the ambulance arrives.**

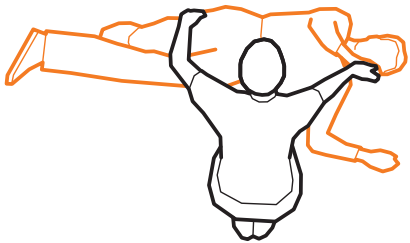
Read and practise the instructions on the following pages, so that you know how to keep them alive until the ambulance gets there.

The recovery position

If someone is unconscious and breathing, put them in the recovery position.

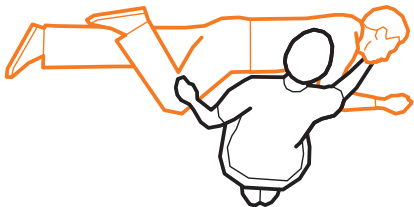
1. Open their airway by tilting the head back and lifting the chin.
2. Straighten the legs.
3. Place the arm nearest to you at right angles to their body.
4. Pull the arm furthest from you across their chest and place the back of their hand against the cheek nearest to you.

**Practise this with a friend
until you can do it
without thinking.**



The recovery position

5. Get hold of the far leg, just above the knee, and pull it up, keeping the foot flat on the ground.
6. Keep their hand pressed against the cheek and pull on the upper leg to roll them towards you, and onto their side.

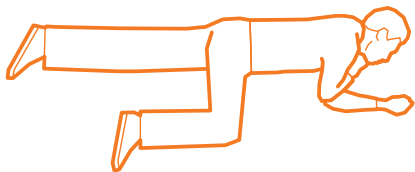


The recovery position

7. Tilt the head back to make sure they can breathe easily.
8. Make sure that both the hip and the knee of the upper leg are bent at right angles.

Dial 999 and ask for an ambulance. Stay with them until the ambulance arrives.

If you do first aid training, you can also learn techniques like mouth to mouth and chest compression, to keep someone's breathing and circulation going.



Calling an ambulance saves lives

If you're worried about the police coming, just tell the operator that someone is unconscious and then explain things properly when the ambulance comes. When you ring 999, try to make sure there is no shouting or panic in the background.

In a lot of areas the police don't come to overdose situations any more. If you do want to know the policy in your area, ask your local drugs service.

What not to do

If someone is unconscious after an overdose, there is nothing you can do to wake them up. The best hope of saving their life is to call an ambulance.

Don't walk people around.

It wastes time, they could fall, or the drugs could get pumped into their bloodstream quicker.



**Don't put them
in a cold bath.**

Wastes time, and there's
a risk of them drowning
or dying of cold.

**Don't hurt, hit or
burn them.**

This is another time waster
- and could cause an injury.



**Don't inject them
with salt water.**

This won't help and it
might be harmful.

(When paramedics use
a salt drip, it's just to keep
the vein open.)



“Every time someone dies, you think ‘that could have been me’. It’s easy to feel powerless. But every positive choice you make can cut down your risk.”

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