

## Keeping Out of Harm's Way

### Tips on How to Stay Safe

If you decide to use drugs, alcohol or cigarettes, it is important to think about how you can make using as safe as possible. We all think that nothing bad will happen to us, but it is better to be safe than sorry.

- **Try to use in safe places** like home or a friend's place. Using in public places like parks or bars increases the chance of being mugged or beaten up.
- **Think about where you use.** Do you use at work, when you have to drive a car, or when you operate machines? Try not to use in situations like these that might endanger you or someone else.
- **Only use drugs if in the company of people you know and trust.** Again this can decrease the chance of being beaten up, robbed, or some other type of harm coming to you.
- **Try to avoid people who might become more touchy, angry or aggressive.** If you know people who behave this way when using, carefully consider whether you use with them.
- **Avoid doing things that might get you in trouble with the police.** Some people also like to do crazy things after using like driving fast or other dangerous acts.
- **Think about who you buy your drugs from.** Not all suppliers sell clean drugs.
- **How strong are the drugs you are using?** If you can get the same effect with a drug that is not as strong, try it.
- **Do you eat well?** Using on an empty stomach can increase the chance of accidental overdose.
- **Budget your money.** Make sure you have enough money to pay the rent, buy food and pay the bills.

To help you get some ideas that might make your drug use safer, complete the form on the next page. If you use more than one type of drug, fill in a separate form for each drug you use.

This material has been adapted from the Managing Mental Health and Substance Use manual developed by the Mental Health Research Institute 2003.

## Helpful Tips for Reducing Your Use of Drugs or the Harm It Does

### Alcohol

- Sip, don't gulp
- Put your glass down between sips
- Eat when you drink or before you drink
- Avoid drinking in rounds
- Don't top up your glass until you have finished what is in there
- Time your drinks ("this drink is going to last me an hour")
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks
- Drink low-alcohol drinks
- Pick your drinking times (for example, between 5.00pm and 8.00pm) and don't drink outside of those times
- Don't drink to quench your thirst - have a glass of water first
- 4 GLASSES A DAY FOR MEN AND TWO GLASSES A DAY FOR WOMEN IS A HEALTHY AMOUNT. Any more than this is a binge which has health consequences
- 14 drinks a week for women and 28 drinks a week for men is the limit to healthy drinking
- Count your drinks and make sure you don't go over the amount you have decided on as your limit

### What strategies could you use?

(You might want to tick the ones that you could use or write them below)

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### Ecstasy/MDMA

- It is safer not to use ecstasy at all
- Because using ecstasy can have such harmful effects, users can find themselves in dangerous situations and should therefore not be left alone. If the situation becomes unsafe call for help immediately.
- If you are dancing, keep cool. Watch your body temperature by taking regular rests and keep cool by wearing light, absorbent clothing. Beware of hats as they trap body heat. Your body should not get hotter than 38.5 degrees C. Drink water but regulate intake so that you do not drink too much.
- Watch for other signs that may show something is wrong, such as confusion, a pulse rate greater than 120 beats per minute, nausea, excessive fluid consumption, severe headache or convulsions. If someone reacts badly, call an ambulance or seek medical help immediately. Tell the ambulance staff what drug the person has taken. If the person is unconscious and you know first aid, place the person in a coma position and keep the airways clear.
- Rest the next day, eat a substantial meal and drink plenty of water and/or juice.
- Do no inject. If you do, however, don't share syringes and injecting equipment (needle, syringe, swab, tourniquet, spoon, glass, filter and sterile water).
- Try to avoid using it on consecutive days (have rest days)
- Try to take only the amount of pills you want to consume for the night to avoid temptation to consume more once the effects of one has worn off. When the initial high has gone make a pact with yourself to go home instead of taking another pill

### What strategies could you use?

(You might want to tick the ones that you could use or write them below)

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## Helpful Tips for Reducing Your Use of Drugs or the Harm It Does

### Heroin

- Burning (chasing the dragon) is safer than injecting, but you can still become dependent and overdose when burning.
- Do not burn on anything toxic such as a plastic spoon.
- If you inject, always use new fits.
- Bleaching used fits is the last resort.
- Never share your injecting equipment, including the spoon, water, filter and tourniquet.
- Avoid using alone in case you overdose.
- Don't use cigarette filters - they contain fibreglass, which can damage your veins. Use a filter wheel, or a small ball of cotton wool or tampon to filter the heroin.
- Have a small taste rather than using all.
- Don't use Heroin with other depressants such as alcohol or benzodiazepines (Eg. Valium)
- Using heroin during the pregnancy increases the risk of miscarriage or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome after birth.

### What strategies could you use?

(You might want to tick the ones that you could use or write them below)

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## Helpful Tips for Reducing Your Use of Drugs or the Harm It Does

### Nicotine

- Reduce the amount of nicotine used per cigarette eg. 4mg instead of 16mg
- Smoking filtered cigarettes as opposed to non-filtered
- Delay the time when you will have your first cigarette
- Decrease your cigarette usage to a lower amount everyday
- Put an elastic band around your cigarette packet – its harder to open and gives you time to think of doing something else
- Nominate a person that can act as your “supporter”
- Use nicotine replacement therapy
- Take up some exercise
- Talk over things with your supporter, friends or family
- Formulate realistic achievable goals
- Become aware of the habits that tempt you to smoke
- Use the 4D’s:
  - Deep breath
  - Drink fluids
  - Do something else
  - Delay when you feel like a smoke
- When you encounter a trigger tempting you to smoke, think of something else to do:
  - When with other smokers try sipping water/coke etc. to keep your hands occupied or chew some nicotine gum
  - Instead of coffee try drinking juice, tea or water
  - If you are bored, go for a walk
  - If you are stressed, practice deep breathing
- Set a day to quit that is not too far away
- Deal with temptation
  - Plan ahead (have a supply of snacks, nicotine gum etc.)
  - Avoid alcohol
  - Just say “NO”
  - Ask friends for help
  - Avoidance
- Reward yourself with the money you save with not smoking!

### What strategies could you use?

(You might want to tick the ones that you could use or write them below)

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