

STAYING ALIVE

OVERDOSE

protect
and
survive

Every month, **over 100 people die** from a drugs overdose. Most of them are in their twenties and early thirties. 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 OTHER PEOPLE** about overdose, and try to get **MORE HELP.**

Many local drugs projects 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 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.

STEVE'S STORY

“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?”

WHAT RISKS ARE YOU TAKING?

know the risks

If you **THINK OVERDOSE** won't happen to you, think again. Most people who overdose think they 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 – often because they gradually use larger and larger amounts. 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)

Depressants combine in the blood and get absorbed at different rates. So you could be boozing in the day, have a hit in the evening, and do benzos later on. This means the drugs could kill you two or three hours after the hit, as they get fully absorbed into your body.

DON'T MIX DEPRESSANTS.

high tolerance

Most deaths from heroin happen to people over 25 who have been using (especially injecting) for a few years. Because your body becomes tolerant to heroin, over time you take a bigger and bigger dose to get the same high. Without realising it, you are also getting closer and closer to the level that can kill you.

**THINK ABOUT 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 – closer to what it was when you first started using. So a dose which would have been OK a week or two ago, could kill you now.

GO EASY AFTER A BREAK.

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.

DON'T SELL YOUR SCRIPT.

stimulants

(like crack and cocaine)

You are 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 slowly can lose hope that things can 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 how to react. Make sure you – and the people around you – are prepared for overdose. And try to agree what you will do if it happens.

**GET FIRST AID TRAINING FROM
YOUR LOCAL DRUGS SERVICE.**

What you know - and what
you do — about overdose
could **MAKE THE DIFFERENCE**
between life and death.

ADAM'S STORY

“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 into him.
I never thought I'd experience
something like that.”

OVERDOSE TRAINING CAN SAVE LIVES

prepare yourself

If you spend time with
PEOPLE WHO USE,
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 people about overdose
- learning how to deal with overdose.

Find out if first aid training for overdose is available at a local drugs project.

OVERDOSE SIGNS: DEPRESSANTS

(heroin, methadone, benzos)

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

Serious: awake but can't talk, very limp, erratic or shallow breathing, heavy vomiting.

Severe: unconscious, blue skin or nails, problems breathing or not breathing at all, choking or gurgling, lying in vomit.

OVERDOSE SIGNS: STIMULANTS

(crack, coke, speed)

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

Serious: can't focus eyes, vomiting, foaming at the mouth, pressure or tightness in the chest, can't talk, can't walk, violent actions.

Severe: seizures, unconscious, choking or gurgling, not breathing, no pulse.

in an emergency

If someone is showing

SEVERE SIGNS of overdose and is

unconscious, this is what you should do:

- 1 Don't panic.
 - 2 Check for signs of overdose.
 - 3 Call the person's name, pinch their ear, then poke them in the chest.
- If the person responds, keep an eye on them and call the ambulance if necessary. If they don't respond, follow steps 4-8
- 4 Lift their chin and check to see if they are breathing by listening close to their nose and mouth and looking at their chest.

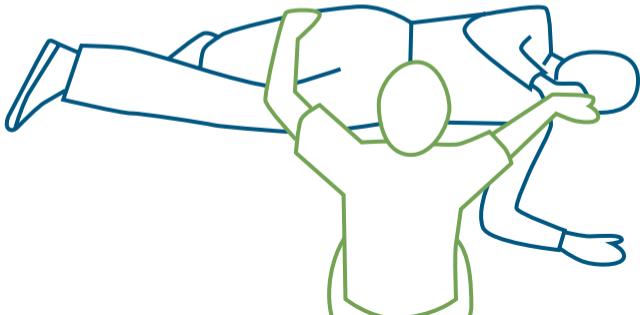
- 5 Dial 999 right away and ask for an ambulance. Tell the operator someone is unconscious and having trouble breathing. Give them the address and directions.
- 6 Make sure there is nothing stuck in their throat.
- 7 Put the person on their side in the recovery position (see over the page for how to do this).
- 8 Stay with them until the ambulance comes. If you can, tell the ambulance crew what they have taken.

By following the steps above, and knowing the recovery position, you could save someone's life.

the recovery position

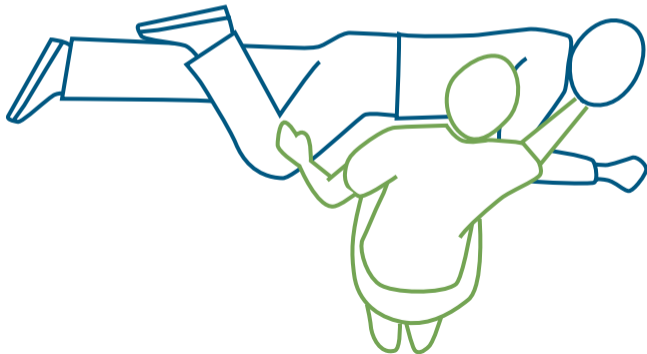
For someone who is unconscious, but still breathing:

- 1 Lie the person straight out on their back.
- 2 Open their airway by tilting their head back and lifting their chin.
- 3 Put the arm nearest to you at right angles to their body.
- 4 Pull the other arm across their chest, so that the back of their hand rests against their cheek.

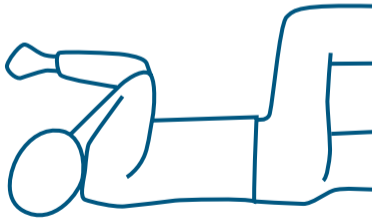


5 Lift the leg furthest away from you, from just above and behind the knee, until their foot is flat on the ground and their knee is bent

6 Keep their hand pressed against their cheek, and gently pull the bent knee towards you, so that they roll onto their side.



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



YOU WON'T GET IT RIGHT UNLESS YOU TRY IT.

Practice the recovery

position — maybe with friends — until YOU CAN DO IT EASILY.

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.

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 might
be harmful if you don't inject
safely. (When paramedics use
a salt drip, it's just to keep the
vein open.)

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. Try to find out the policy in your local area from your local drugs service.

“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.”

GARY

Contact your local; drugs service
or talk to FRANK on 0800 77 66 00

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www.nta.nhs.uk