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19 ways to reduce your risk from stimulants

stimulants

harm reduction advice

What are stimulants?

Stimulants tend to make people feel more alert and awake, and can make you feel very happy or euphoric. Some stimulants are also hallucinogenic.

Stimulants available in Northern Ireland include drugs like ecstasy, speed and cocaine as well as lots of newer drugs which are sometimes sold as ecstasy, or are sold as legal highs or just a white powder or crystal.

Side effects on your body include...
dizziness, tremor, headache, flushed skin, chest pains with palpitations, excessive sweating, vomiting, sleeplessness and abdominal cramps.

These effects may occur as a result of taking too large a dose at one time or taking large doses over an extended period of time.

Side effects on your mind include...
agitation, paranoia, hallucinations/hearing things, hostility, panic, aggression, depression and suicidal tendencies.

Overdose can cause...
high fever, convulsions, stroke, or heart problems like cardiac arrest, sometimes leading to death. Physical activity (dancing or running) can increase risks by putting more pressure on your heart or making you heat up.

The best advice is never to take any drug unless it has been prescribed for you.

If you're going to take stimulants, you may find the advice in this leaflet useful. Some of it comes from scientific reports, and some of it comes from drug users themselves.

7 ways to reduce your risks before you even start:

preparing to take stimulants

#1

Think carefully about the risks before you start, especially if you have mental health problems.

Using stimulants can put your mental health at greater risk.

#2

Try to take drugs with someone else there, someone you can trust to look after you if things go wrong.

#3 Think about the people you use with, and the views they have on how to take drugs.

Groups of friends who take drugs together tend to have **"norms"** or ways they normally do things. If those norms include taking large amounts or using over days at a time, then the people in that group are at a higher risk. Having norms you think are sensible can reduce your risks a lot. **Chat with your mates about it.**

#4 **Try and eat something beforehand, even if just a snack.**

#5 **Try to find out as much as you can about the particular type of herbal you plan to take:**

Ask other people who've taken it what effects it had - but remember that the same drug can act differently on different people. **The info you have may be wrong**: drugs with the same name may not actually be the same. The description on the package, or what you've read about the drug may be inaccurate.

#6 Try not to take stimulants for days in a row

Taking breaks or using for shorter periods of time can reduce the risk of death from stroke or heart problems.

#7 **Carry condoms** (you know why!)

6 more ways to reduce your risks:

once you're using....

#8 Start low and go slow.

Take a small amount and let it reach its peak effect to test how strong it is. Different drugs act at different speeds, and if you don't feel the effects after a while, it may not mean that the drug is weak - it may mean you have taken a strong drug which takes a while to come on. **Taking more too soon could lead to overdose.**

#9 Keep hydrated.

Aim to drink about a pint of water per hour but **don't drink too much**: some stimulants (like ecstasy) make the body keep in water, and the pressure can shut down your breathing and heartbeat. Also:

- **avoid alcohol** - it causes dehydration;
- **avoid energy drinks**: they contain lots of caffeine which can increase the strain on the heart; and
- **keeping hydrated is especially important in warm places.**

#10

Keep cool.

Overheating can stop you breathing. If you're feeling warm, open a window or go outside.

#11

If you're snorting, take care of your nostrils...

This will help stop your nose bunging up so when you've stopped using you can get some sleep. Before & after snorting, dab your fingers in water and sniff it up your nose until you feel it run down your throat.

#12

Don’t share snorting equipment

blood borne viruses (hepatitis or HIV) can be transmitted in tiny amounts of blood, too small to see.

#13

Don’t mix stimulants with other drugs or alcohol.

Most people who die after taking drugs have taken more than one drug (including alcohol). Sticking to one substance and not taking anything else is a simple way to reduce your risks.

6 more ways to reduce your risks:

look after your friends

#14

Don't let anyone go off by themselves. If anyone becomes unwell, stay with them.

#15

If a friend has a panic attack...

Get them to sit down, head down, encourage regular breathing & reassure them.

However, if there are more serious symptoms, including delusional behaviour or breathing difficulties, **call an ambulance**.

Most people who die after taking drugs have taken more than one drug (including alcohol).

Sticking to one substance and not taking anything else is a simple way to reduce your risks.

#16 If someone appears to be hallucinating or has lost touch with reality...

...remain calm, and try to help the person:

- approach the person quietly while calling their name;
- ask the person to tell you what is happening. Ask whether he or she is afraid or confused;
- tell the person that he or she may be having a hallucination and....

#16 If someone appears to be hallucinating or lost touch...

...that you do not see or hear what he or she does. Try not to argue with them;

- talk with the person about the experience, and ask whether there is anything you can do to help;
- help the person find ways to handle the hallucinations, such as listening to soothing music; and
- do not hurry the person.

#17 **If a friend has worrying symptoms, call an ambulance and reassure them. If someone is ill, the sooner they receive emergency medical treatment, the more likely it is they'll survive.**

3 more ways to reduce your risks:

coming down...

#18

You can reduce your risk of overdose by not taking other drugs while coming down.

#19

Go somewhere you feel safe to relax.

Ring a friend if you start to feel depressed, frightened or unwell. If you feel suicidal after using, remember that this will pass and you won't always feel this way. You can ring **Lifeline** 24/7 on **0808 808 8000** to talk to a counsellor, in confidence.

Where can I get more information or help?

- **If you think you may have a problem with drugs...** your GP can provide help and advice and refer you to other relevant services.
- **If you/someone has immediate serious health concerns relating to drug use...** emergency services should be contacted immediately.
- **If you/someone is in distress or despair...** you can ring Lifeline at 0808 808 8000 to talk to a counsellor in confidence.
- **If you've taken a drug with nasty side effects & think others should be warned about it...** please contact the PHA's Drug & Alcohol Monitoring & Information System: damis@hscni.net
- **If you'd like to reduce the harms from your drug use...** you can go to a "Low Threshold Service". Staff will not judge you for taking drugs, and will help you find ways to reduce your risks of harm >>>

Contact your local Low Threshold Services at:

Belfast area. Drug Outreach Team. 02895 047 301

Northern area. Extern. 02825 689 601

Southern area. Extern. 02825 689 601

S.Eastern area. Simon Comm. 07435 754307 / 754302

Western area

- Derry area: Depaul. 02871 365 259
- Fermanagh & Omagh areas: Arc Healthy Living Centre. 02868 628741
- Limavady area: First Housing. 02871 371 849

Telephone numbers can change. If you're having problems getting through on any of the telephone numbers, check the details on the PHA's site:

www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/drug-and-alcohol-directories-services

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