



Safer-use Strategies: Downers/Depressants

Depressants are “downers” and include opioids, benzos, and barbiturates. They can be prescribed like Oxy, Vicodin, and Xanax, or street drugs like heroin. Here are some tips to help you stay safer and healthier no matter how you choose to change your use. Using more safely does not mean that you remove all risks, including death, but it can help you reduce your drug-related harm. You are worth it!

Ways to be safer and healthier without changing use

Carry rescue drugs

- **Why?** Opioids like heroin, fentanyl and Oxys can lead to overdose.
- **How?** Carry naloxone (Narcan) with you and give it to your family and friends who are near you when you use. Naloxone is a drug that may be inhaled through your nose or injected to reverse an opioid overdose. Use the buddy system when you use opioids so your friend can administer naloxone. Check out www.stopoverdose.org.

Test your drugs

- **Why?** You can be more aware if your drugs are cut with other drugs (like fentanyl) or fillers (like levamisole) that could harm you. Note: Current methods are not failsafe.
- **How?** Talk to providers about getting a urine drug testing kit and testing liquids before you shoot them. For pills and powders, check out <https://dancesafe.org> for testing kits.

Nuture your body

- **Why?** Some depressants can dull your appetite, and used in larger quantities, depressants can take their toll on your body.
- **How?** Try to eat nutritious foods before you use, pack healthy snacks and water on the go. **For people who don't get strung out:** Let your body rest for at least a day before using again, and try to take just as many days off as you used for.

Take care of your veins

- **Why?** If you are shooting drugs, you can take care of your veins.
- **How?** Drink water to keep yourself hydrated, rotate your injection sites, and learn about techniques that could help you stay safer and healthier when you use (e.g., <http://harmreduction.org/issues/drugs-drug-users/drug-information/straight-dope-education-series/>).

Choose safer ways of using

- **Why?** Some ways of using drugs are less risky to your health.
- **How?** Taking drugs by mouth is safer than snorting or smoking which is safer than shooting. Snorting opioids has a greater risk of overdose than smoking them. You can get clean works at the People's Harm Reduction Alliance or the King County Needle Exchange.

Shoot safer

- **Why?** Avoid overdose, bloodborne illness (HIV and hepatitis C), bacterial infections.
- **How?** Pace yourself until you know the strength of your stash. Shooting into veins in your arms or hands is safer than hitting blind into your groin or into your neck. Rotate sites and shoot downstream if possible. Using new, clean needles and works can help prevent bloodborne illnesses, like HIV and hepatitis C, and other infections.

Avoid mixing drugs

- **Why?** Using different drugs at the same time can have unexpected effects, put stress on your heart, and lead to overdose.
- **How?** Try to stick to one drug at a time, especially when you are unsure of its strength or content.

Use with safe people in a safe place

- **Why?** Use of depressants can cause sleepiness, make you confused, and lower your inhibitions. People can take advantage of you when you're high.
- **How?** Avoid using with people you don't know or trust. Use where you feel safe and in control of the surroundings. Do not drive or ride your bike when you are high.

Less is more

- **Why?** You can avoid overdosing or experiencing drugs' toxic effects.
- **How?** You can decide how you want to limit your use. You could choose to buy only a certain amount or set a spending limit. Leave the rest of your money at home or in a safe place. You might ask a trusted friend to remind you of your limit.

Choose not to use

- **Why?** Not using—even for a few hours or days—gives your body a rest and may help you to avoid your body or mind becoming dependent on depressants.
- **How?** If you are not yet dependent and don't get strung out, you should not use for long periods of time and take days off from use every week to avoid getting hooked. Check in with a provider if you want to stop altogether.

Talk to a provider about withdrawal

- **Why?** If you are highly dependent, alcohol and benzo withdrawal can be life-threatening. Other depressants may have uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms. These can be particularly harmful to unborn babies and people with HIV or other illnesses.
- **How?** Talk to your provider if you are cutting down or stopping. They may be able to help. Also, there are some effective medications to help with opioid dependence.

Ways to use more safely

Ways to change how much you use