



# How to reduce your risk of harm

## Have you decided to cut down your use?

Then perhaps it's time to think about the way you use the substance to reduce your risk and harms you could experience.

If you think you are using too much, but are not dependent, one helpful way you can reduce your risk of harm immediately is to take a break from substance use. For alcohol, tobacco and cannabis – depending on your current level of use, you may experience a period of uncomfortable withdrawal. Though unpleasant, a trial-period of abstinence will allow you to determine whether you can finally cut-down and quit, or whether you might need assistance from a health professional to do so.

Taking a break is also a good way of preparing for changes if you decide to continue using. However, if you are using every day and think you might be physically dependent, then taking a break from substance use might cause severe withdrawals which in many cases should be assisted by a health professional. Seek medical advice before attempting to quit heavy use of substances, in particular opioids.

### Reduce the Risks

- Don't drive or operate machinery, or do dangerous activities if you have used drugs, or if you are experiencing the after effects (crash; fatigue; hangover etc)

Injecting amphetamines or cocaine increases the risk of mental health issues, induced psychosis and dependence

Injecting heroin and other depressant drugs increases the risk of dependence and overdose

- Use smaller amounts and use less often – and remember, how strong the drug is or
- Don't use more than one substance on any using day
- Don't use drugs while you are pregnant or breastfeeding as it can harm your baby
- If you are on medications you should talk to your GP about risks
- If you are experiencing anxiety, depression or other mental health problems think about seeking help
- Practice good hygiene
- Eat nutritious foods
- Make sure you get good night's sleep.

### Injection

With that said, if you currently use drugs by injection, you might want to think about changing from injecting. It is strongly recommended that you change from injecting, as there are less risky ways of using.

If you inject drugs you increase the risk of harm from the drug as well as harm that results from injecting.

It is safer not to inject because of the risk of blood borne viruses (Hepatitis B and C and HIV) and other infections.

If you still inject you may want to make some changes like:

- Always use clean equipment such as needles, syringes, spoons, filters etc
- Never share equipment with others.

It is always risky to use drugs, but there are ways to reduce the risk.

**Now that you know how to reduce your risk of harm, here are some related sheets that you might also find useful:**

[How to cope with cravings](#)

[How to challenge unhelpful thoughts](#)

[How to be assertive](#)

[How to prepare for and respond to a slip](#)

[How to manage a slip](#)

[How to practice mindfulness](#)