

# OverDOSE

Could you help save a life in the event of an overdose?

## What is an Overdose?

Simply put an overdose occurs WHEN THE DOSE IS TOO HEAVY.

An overdose happens when too much of a drug or poison is taken, leading to a toxic effect on the body. Sometimes death may occur instantly or over a period of time as a result of permanent organ damage.

Many substances can cause a toxic state - even food, water, herbs, legal substances, prescribed medicines, alcohol and cigarette butts.

## Tips for preventing overdoses

- Know what you are taking. What is in the mix?
- What is the level of purity? What is a recommended dose?
- Know the drug's strength and if it is a short acting, long acting or extended release action.
- If you forget to take your meds don't increase the next dose to catch up.
- Mixing stimulants with depressants increases your risk of overdose.
- Do not mix your drugs (poly use) especially stimulants and depressants including alcohol, benzos, antidepressants, cocaine, mephedrone and energy drinks.
- Avoid mixing long acting pharmacological drugs such as methadone and benzos.
- If you have not taken drugs or used for a few days, halve your dose. Even short breaks mean your tolerance will quickly lower.
- Always use in company, never drink or use drugs alone.

## When is an overdose most likely?

- If you use alone
- When you have been released from jail, prison, drug treatment or drug detox
- If you have kidney disease, liver disease, AIDS, hepatitis or are unwell
- When you have not used for a while, even short breaks mean your tolerance will quickly lower
- When you don't know what you are taking and when purity levels have changed
- When in poor physical or mental health you are at greater risk of overdose
- Long term users are also at high risk

Thousands of Australians are hospitalised each year for drug overdoses.

20% of these are children under 5 years of age. A large number of these are accidental and nearly all are preventable. Loss of life or irreversible harm due to overdose, impacts the lives of individuals, their friends, families and the larger community.

## Overdose from Stimulants

- Sudden collapse or loss of consciousness
- Experiencing a stroke or sudden weakness and numbness to the face, legs or arms
- Fast or difficult breathing or panting
- Headache, ringing in the ears, dizziness
- Shaking or seizures
- Profuse sweating or failure to sweat
- Nausea and vomiting
- Psychosis, unusually anxious or aggressive or hallucinatory behaviour
- Muscle cramps, inability to urinate, foaming at the mouth

**Common stimulant drugs include** cocaine, amphetamine, methylamphetamine, caffeine, nicotine, mephedrone, ice and cannabis. Stimulants are present in many 'legal highs'.

## Overdose from Depressants

- Unresponsive to outside stimulus
- Unconscious or seemingly awake but unable to talk
- Breathing is very slow, shallow, erratic or stopped
- Snoring, gurgling or choking sounds
- Face is pale or clammy, lips and fingernails turn blue or purple
- Body is limp
- Vomiting

**Common depressant drugs include** codeine, methadone, cannabis, heroin, morphine, oxycodone, hydromorphone, benzodiazepine (benzos include many medicines ending in 'pam' such as diazepam-valium, flunitrazepam-rohypnol, nitrazepam-mogadon), alcohol, toxic vapours, PCP (phencyclidine) and GBH (gamma-hydroxybutyrate). Depressants are present in many 'legal highs'.

## Common Drug Types

**Tobacco** - *stimulant* (cigs, fags, butts, smokes, cancer sticks, ciggies, rollies)

There are more than 4000 chemicals in tobacco smoke. Many of these chemicals are poisonous and at least 43 of them are carcinogenic (cause cancer). The 3 major chemicals in tobacco smoke are: Nicotine, Tar and Carbon monoxide (CO), a colourless, odourless and very toxic gas. Smokers typically have high levels of CO in the blood. CO reduces the amount of oxygen available to the muscles and brain, especially the heart. Less oxygen means the heart must work harder which can lead to heart attack/stroke.

**In Australia, tobacco use is responsible for approximately 15,000 deaths each year.**

**Nicotine** - *stimulant* (cigarettes contain between 0.6 – 1.4mg of nicotine)

Nicotine is found in cigarettes as well as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) such as gum and patches. Nicotine poisoning occurs from consuming high doses of nicotine, which can be fatal.

One cigarette's-worth of nicotine is enough to make a toddler severely ill. In some cases children have become poisoned by eating butts from an ash tray.

**Alcohol mixed with energy drinks/coffee** - *depressant + stimulant*

Alcohol is a depressant, slowing the functions of the brain, causing drowsiness, impaired cognitive functioning such as poor concentration, judgement, coordination and emotional mood swings. Caffeine is a stimulant that can increase alertness, nervousness, and dizziness. The mixture results in a "wide awake drunk". **The risk of alcohol poisoning increases because the true symptoms of overdose are masked by the energy drink. The alcohol poisoning may not be detected until irreversible harm to major organs of the body has taken place.**

**Alcohol** - *depressant* (booze, brew, cold one, hair of the dog, hard stuff, nightcap)

Overdose or alcohol poisoning occurs when drinking continues past the point of intoxication. There is no safe level of alcohol consumption. Alcohol poisoning can be serious. The effects of this condition will depend on the amount of alcohol consumed, but includes coma, damage to the heart and liver, and sometimes death. The biggest problem with cases of serious alcohol poisoning is the symptoms are similar to those of non-fatal intoxication and are often ignored.

**Ecstasy** (MDMA) - *stimulant and hallucinogen*

(x, e, adam, beans, candy, disco biscuits, doves, e-bomb, happy pill, scooby snacks, sweets, skittles)

Ecstasy taken in high concentrations can be dangerous or even fatal. Ecstasy can be particularly dangerous when taken with other drugs (poly use).

**Cannabis** - *depressant, stimulant and hallucinogen* (dope, marijuana, weed, grass, ganja, skunk, hashish, hash oil, reefer, herb, yarndi)

Modern cannabis is a complex substance and may affect the body in many ways including euphoria, anxiety and even psychosis. Different types and methods of growing the plant can cause the strengths and effects to have enormous variations. The effects of cannabis overdose are nausea, dizziness, hallucinations and drowsiness.

**Caffeine** - *stimulant* (C pills, yellow jackets, bathroom express, java, eye opener)

Caffeine is found in food, drink and pill form.

Effects of overdose include jitters, restlessness, nervousness, anxiety, increased heartbeat, nausea, heart palpitations, insomnia, sweating, dizziness, vomiting and may cause cardiac arrest.

**Synthetic pharmaceutical opiates** - *depressant*

Codeine – painkillers including oxycodone and hydromorphone

Codeine is often found in over the counter painkillers and prescription cough syrups.

**If someone has overdosed on codeine it is important they receive emergency care immediately so they can be given an antidote.**

**Analgesics** (painkillers)

Aspirin, codeine, ibuprofen, paracetamol, nurofen plus (codeine + Ibuprofen), aspalgin and codral cold & flu original (aspirin + codeine), panadeine forte, panamax co (paracetamol + codeine)

Aspirin overdose effects can include headaches, dizziness, confusion, drowsiness, thirst, seizures, coma, nausea, vomiting, sweating, fever, deafness, rapid and shallow breathing, respiratory failure.

**As with all overdose situations call 000**

Ibuprofen overdose effects can include drowsiness, seizures, coma, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, agitation, confusion.

**If someone has overdosed on ibuprofen it is important they receive urgent medical attention.**

Paracetamol overdose effects can include drowsiness, seizures, coma, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting. **If someone has overdosed on paracetamol this is highly dangerous. It is important they receive emergency care immediately to reduce permanent liver damage or death.**

**Benzos** - *depressant* (benzos, rowies, serries, moggies, vals, V, normies, downers, tranx and sleepers)

Benzodiazepines are a group of drugs called minor tranquillisers, often known as benzos.

Diazepam, valium, oxazepam, serepax, nitrazepam, mogadon, flunitrazepam, rohypnol, bromazepam, lextotan, clonazepam, rivotril, librium, temazepam, and lorazepam. (Cont.)

Using benzodiazepines at the same time as any other drug, including alcohol, can be dangerous. Mixing benzodiazepines with other drugs that slow down the body, for example, alcohol, sleeping pills, heroin and cannabis can cause death.

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**Amphetamine** - *stimulant* (speed, whiz, uppers)

Amphetamines also include ADHD medication - dexamphetamine/ dexedrine (psycho stimulant) and methylphenidate (ritalin) and weight loss medication - phentermine (adipex, fastin, phen 375) Methylamphetamine - stimulant (meth, speed, pep pills, base, pure, point, wax, leopard's blood, ox blood, red speed)

Methylamphetamine hydrochloride - stimulant (ice, meth, d-meth, glass, crystal, batu, shabu, crank)

Mephedrone - stimulant (drone, m cat, meow-meow, plant food, bubbles, kitty cat)

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**Methadone** - *depressant* (a synthetic opiate)

Overdose may occur when more than the prescribed dose is taken, when injected or when taken with other drugs, such as alcohol or benzos. Methadone syrup was never designed for use by injection. It is not a sterile fluid and if injected may cause increased hypersensitivity, allergic reactions and other symptoms of depressant medication.

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**Heroin** - *depressant* (junk, dope, smack, shot, shit, h)

Heroin is processed from morphine, a naturally occurring substance extracted from the seedpod of the Asian poppy plant. Heroin usually appears as a white or brown powder. The poppy variety which has been developed in Tasmania is genetically different to the original Asian poppy. Tassie poppies are grown to produce thebaine a chemical more toxic than morphine. The presence of thebaine in the poppy plant can cause severe fits if ingested.

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**Inhalants** - *depressant and hallucinogen* (there are a large variety of common products and aerosols in this group)

Even a small amount will produce effects of dizziness, loss of coordination, muscular movement, slurring of speech, mental deterioration, hallucinations, drowsiness, respiratory failure and coma.

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**PCP** - *depressant* (phencyclidine - a strong animal tranquilizer)

PCP users risk heart attacks, breathing problems and renal failure. A common symptom is looking around a room and seeming unwilling or unable to focus on a single spot. They may begin to feel extremely depressed or aggressive. The most serious symptom of PCP overdose is a loss of consciousness and death.

**Ketamine** - *hallucinogen* (k, ket, kitkat, super or special k)

Overdose may cause drowsiness, temporary paralysis, semi-consciousness, erratic, hostile or bizarre behaviour, feelings of panic or terror, paranoia, depression, amnesia, muscle rigidity, increased saliva, increased body temperature, irregular heartbeat, anesthesia and reduced physical sensations with increased risk of injury, convulsions, coma and 'near death' experiences.

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**Anabolic Steroids** - *performance enhancer*, (arnold, gym, stackers, juice)

The use of anabolic steroids without a medical condition that requires them is an overdose.

Most anabolic steroids are synthetically manufactured variations of testosterone. No anabolic steroid is devoid of androgenic effects (permanently stunted growth, permanent physical changes including deepening of the voice, increased facial and body hair growth, shrinkage of the testicles, enlargement of the male breast tissue, and sterility). Anabolic steroid use can damage the liver, increase cholesterol levels and induce psychological effects such as aggression, increased feelings of hostility, psychological dependence and addiction.

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**GBH/GBL/GHB** - *depressant* (fantasy, grievous bodily harm)

GBH - Gamma-hydroxybutyrate and GBL - Gamma-butyrdactone

GBL is part of the chemical makeup of GBH and can be consumed on its own. GBH affects the central nervous system within 15 minutes of consumption.

Even a small increase in dose can cause serious effects or death.

**Magic Mushrooms** - *hallucinogen* (liberties, magics, mushies, liberty cap, shrooms)

Mushrooms containing psilocybin can cause hallucinations. Taking a large amount can cause an overdose. Signs and symptoms include paranoia, delusions, hallucinations, feelings of invincibility and sometimes vomiting.

Occasionally poisonous mushrooms are mistaken for psilocybin mushrooms. This can result in serious nausea, muscle cramps, and symptoms that can endanger life. **If you notice any of these symptoms, contact a Poison Control Centre 131 126 as quickly as possible.**

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**Other common substances**

Many substances can cause a toxic state, even food, water, herbs, legal substances, prescribed medicines, alcohol and cigarette butts. Water, just like any other substance, can be considered a poison when over-consumed. An overdose of water may cause a fatal disturbance in brain functions causing the normal balance of electrolytes in the body to push outside safe limits.



## Save a life

### What to do if you suspect an overdose

1. Keep them calm, and if unconscious lay them on their side
2. Act right away and call 000 for an ambulance  
If you are concerned about the police or do not want to deal with them still call 000  
You do not need to give a name, (supply an alias if the operator asks)  
You are only required to tell the operator
  - Where you are
  - If the person is conscious or unconscious
  - If the person is breathing or not breathing
3. Stay with the person until help arrives
4. Use basic life support

The more information you are able to give to the emergency services the better. You can tell the paramedics more when they arrive. If you have Naloxone (Narcan) - use it. Naloxone can temporarily reverse an opiate overdose.

**If you know CPR and are willing to give it proceed. The emergency operator can talk you through CPR.**

### DO NOT:

- Inject someone overdosing on a depressant with a stimulant as it can overload the body. Do not make someone drink coffee or another substance if they have passed out.
- Do not put the person into an ice bath. It could send them into shock. Do not inject them with salt water, drugs or milk. It won't bring them back.
- Do not inflict pain to rouse a person. It will have no effect on an unconscious person and depressant drugs like opiates/opioids dull the sensation of pain.
- Do not try and walk someone about. It can increase the rate of absorption of the drug into the body.

### KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TAKING

SMS Australians Drug Information Service  
**0439 TELL ME (0439 835 563)**  
or call poison control at 131 126

If you are worried about your use of drugs, use [www.drugsmeter.com](http://www.drugsmeter.com) (UK) for free anonymous interactive feedback.

## Could you help save a life in the event of an overdose?

### NALOXONE

**All opiate overdoses can be temporarily halted with the use of Naloxone. Anyone using opiate based medicines or illicit opiate based drugs should seek Naloxone training and a free supply of Naloxone.**

### What can I do?

- Push for Naloxone to be freely available in Tasmania! Presently in Australia Naloxone is not widely available, although all paramedics carry it as part of the emergency response kit and it is being trialled in Canberra.
- Learn as much as you can about the medications you or family or friends take, and understand the risks of overdose.
- Share the information in this leaflet with friends and family.
- Learn how to save a life; attend a local first aid training or CPR course.
- Discuss in your family how to protect the younger children from ingesting nicotine, alcohol, medications or other drugs.
- Raise awareness in your local community regarding Naloxone (Narcan).
- Educate your local Member to increase pressure at a national level to roll out free Naloxone to everyone in the community willing to save a life.
- Ask staff at your local needle exchange, drug service and your doctor about the availability of Naloxone.
- If you use opioid pharmaceutical medications, or know someone who does, ask your doctor or pharmacist about Naloxone (Narcan) and training.
- Start a campaign to raise awareness of Naloxone and its use in Australia
- Push for free naloxone nasal spray being available for all members of the public who wish to carry this life saving drug.



References available on request

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