

Overdose

Everything you need to know

Includes free DVD!





Please read this booklet.

We guarantee you'll learn something new.

**When you've read it, you'll know about
overdose myths and:**

- what to do if you see someone overdose;
- how to reduce your risk of overdosing.
- what not to do; and

**Please talk to your friends about what you've read.
Make sure people around you know what to do if they
see someone overdosing.**



“If you don’t do the right thing,
you’ll just watch someone die,
and that will stay with you.”

Quote from ‘Going over’ – an overdose prevention film (on the DVD)

People often die from overdoses because other people don't know what to do to help.

This booklet aims to change that by giving you information on:

- overdose risks;
- methadone and overdose;
- myths and things that are dangerous to do;
- calling an ambulance; and
- first aid for people who have overdosed.

As well as reading about what to do, please:

- practise the recovery position; and
- talk to your friends about what can cause overdose, and what you should do when someone overdoses.

Many drug services provide short training courses on how to avoid overdoses, and respond to them if they happen.

Going on an overdose response training course could help you to save a life.

The main things that cause overdose are:

Injecting

People who inject heroin are much more likely to overdose, and much more likely to die, than people who smoke it.

Mixing drugs and alcohol

Most overdoses happen when people have alcohol or downers (like valium and temazepam) in their system at the same time as heroin.

Injecting heroin when tolerance is low

If you stop or cut down it only takes a few days for your tolerance to drop.

After a week, or less, without

opioids like heroin or methadone, a dose that at one time wouldn't have touched you could kill you.

Getting into treatment reduces your risk.

People who die have often overdosed before and survived. The more you overdose, the more likely you are to die.

Think about your own overdose risks.

Think about the risks taken by people you know.

Look after yourself. Look after your mates.

Fact:

Many people who die from a drug overdose die two or three hours after injecting heroin.

Usually this is because they've drunk alcohol or taken downers, before or after taking methadone or heroin. **So, just because someone survives the initial hit, it doesn't mean they're going to be okay.**

Fact:

Not all overdoses are accidental.

Feeling depressed, hopeless or not caring whether you live or die can all make overdose more likely. It is important to talk about your feelings – especially if you are feeling like you can't cope.

Methadone

If you inject heroin, methadone treatment reduces the risk of overdose.

Heroin injectors who are not in methadone treatment are around 11 times more likely to die than those who are in treatment!

Methadone takes a few days to build up in your system at the start of treatment, so don't expect it to work instantly.

The overdose risks are higher if people take methadone and drink alcohol within a few hours of each other.

Although it doesn't feel like heroin, it is powerful stuff and drinking or using other drugs (especially when you start treatment) can cause an overdose. Some methadone overdoses happen to people who have bought methadone from someone in treatment.

As little as 40 mg of methadone can kill an adult who doesn't have a tolerance: so if you are prescribed methadone, take care of it, and **make sure no one else can take it.**

Myths

There are lots of myths about what to do to bring someone round when they have overdosed.

But if someone has taken a lethal dose of drugs, there is nothing you can do to wake them up – call an ambulance.

The paramedics can then give them naloxone (the heroin antidote) and oxygen.

Myth 1

“Walking people around helps”



Wrong!

Trying to walk people around may make things worse because it wastes time, and there is a risk they might fall.

It is also possible that as the heartbeat increases with the exercise, the drugs will be absorbed into their bloodstream more quickly.

Myth 2

“Putting people in a cold bath wakes them up”



Wrong!

If you know of people who woke up when they were put in the bath, it was because they were lucky and hadn't taken a lethal dose.

It was not because they were put in the bath.

Putting people in the bath is dangerous because it takes time to run the bath – and they could die while it is filling. There is also a risk of injury while they are being put in the bath and taken out, and of drowning while they are in there.

Myth 3

“Slapping or hurting someone can bring them round”



Wrong!

You do need to know if someone is sleeping or unconscious. You can tell this by shouting at them, or pinching their ear.

Anything more drastic won't make any difference to whether or not they come round.

If shouting and pinching doesn't wake them, they are unconscious and you need to call an ambulance and start first aid.

Myth 4

“Injecting people with salt water is an antidote to overdose”



Wrong!

Some people think that giving an injection of salt water to someone who has overdosed will bring them round.

The idea of injecting people with salt water might have come from people seeing friends in hospital being given a saline (salt) drip.

But the drip is only put up to keep a vein ‘open’ so they can inject medication. The salt doesn’t affect the overdose at all.



Injecting salt water is dangerous because:

- it wastes time when you should be putting the person in the recovery position and calling for an ambulance; and
- if, in the panic, you give the salt water in a used syringe, it could give them HIV or hepatitis.

**If someone is unconscious
they need an ambulance.**

Try to make sure there is no shouting or panic in the background when you dial 999.

Calling an ambulance saves lives.

If you think the policy of the police and ambulance services in your area could be improved to encourage all drug users to call 999 when needed, you can talk to your local Drug Action Team about what might help.

The DAT is responsible for getting everyone to work together to prevent drug problems. There may be a drug user representative on the Drug Action Team who could help get this type of problem sorted.

If there isn't a drug user representative on the DAT, tell the drug service or needle exchange your ideas for improving the local policy.

You can find out how to contact your DAT by ringing 0800 77 66 00.

**The rest of this booklet has
information on how to tell
when someone is unconscious,
and how to keep them alive
until the ambulance gets there.**



Signs of an overdose

The signs of overdose include:

- **snoring deeply;**
- **turning blue** (especially the lips); and
- **not breathing.**

Are they unconscious?

A person is unconscious if you can't wake them by shouting or pinching their ear.

What you need to do

Look, listen and feel for breathing for no more than 10 seconds.

If they are still breathing

Put them in the recovery position
(see next page).

If they are not breathing

Don't panic.

Dial 999 and ask for an ambulance.

Start CPR (see the page after next).

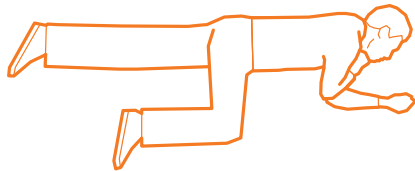
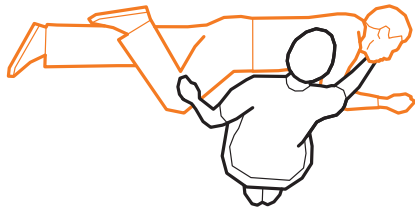
The recovery position

This is the best position for a casualty who is unconscious and breathing.

If the casualty is unconscious but breathing, place them on their side in the recovery position as shown.

Make sure that the airway remains open by tilting the head back and lifting the chin. Check breathing.

Monitor the casualty's condition until help arrives.

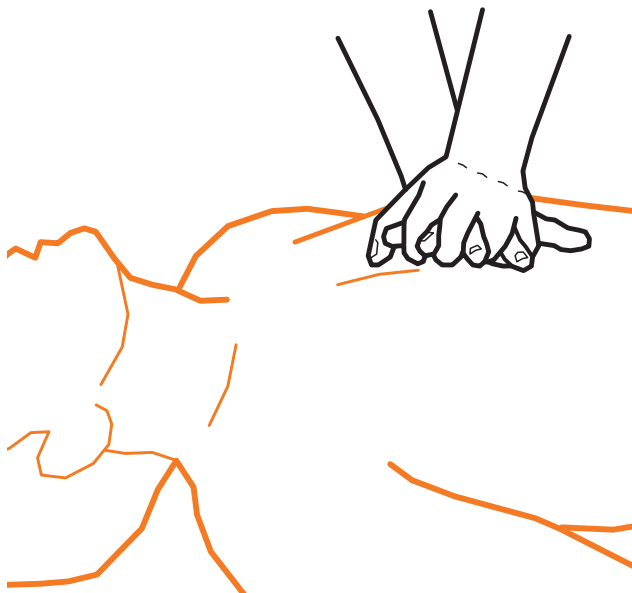


CPR

If an adult is not breathing normally you must call an ambulance and then start cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), which is a combination of chest compressions and rescue breaths.

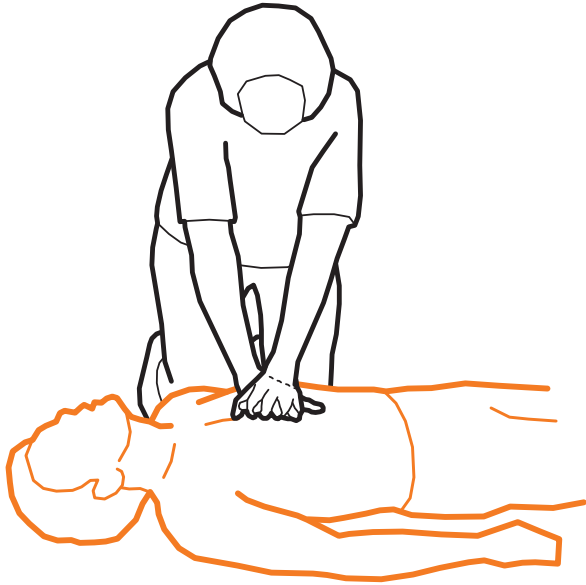
Chest compressions

Place your hands on the centre of their chest and, with the heel of your hand, press down (4 to 5 cm).



Each chest compression pushes blood around the body so keeping the vital organs, especially the brain, supplied with some oxygenated blood.

**After every 30 chest compressions
give two rescue breaths.**



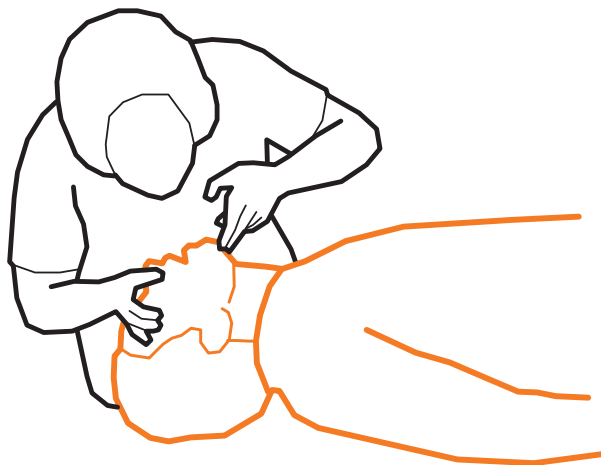
Rescue breaths

Give rescue breaths – open the airway by tilting the head back and lifting the chin.

Pinch their nose closed, put your mouth over theirs and attempt two rescue breaths – each one lasting one second.

Continue with 30 chest compressions followed by two rescue breaths until emergency help arrives or the person begins to breathe normally.

If you are unable or unwilling to give rescue breaths, give chest compressions only.



The aim of chest compressions is not to restart the heart – the chance of doing this by chest compressions alone is very slim.

Chest compressions pump a small amount of blood around the body to keep the key organs alive, most importantly the brain.

Chest compressions significantly increase the possibility of the person being successfully resuscitated by the emergency services.

It is possible that you will not see any change in the person's condition while carrying out chest compressions.

You should continue chest compressions for as long as possible. Only stop chest compressions if you see obvious signs of recovery, if emergency services staff are in place to take over from you, or you become too tired to carry on.

What's on the disc?



Overdose

Going over

Going over presents four overdose scenarios dramatised from real events. The stories give clear and important messages about responding to overdose.



Recovery

How to put people who have overdosed in the recovery position and call an ambulance!

Overdose

Mr Mange goes over

A black comedy about overdose death!

Using a darkly comic cartoon style, Mr Mange goes over is a very serious look at the causes of heroin overdose and how to avoid it.

Warning: contains explicit language and drug references.



The Harm Reduction Works resources are produced by Exchange Supplies for the National Treatment Agency and Department of Health as part of the Reducing Drug Related Harm Action Plan.

First aid information provided by first aid experts the British Red Cross: redcross.org.uk/firstaid

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