Safer-use Strategies: Uppers/Stimulants

Stimulants are “uppers” and include cocaine, crack, meth, MDMA (Molly) and bath salts, as well as prescribed drugs like Ritalin and Adderall. 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 stay healthier when you use

Prepare for safer sex

- **Why?** Stimulant use can lower your inhibitions and turn up your sex drive.
- **How?** It’s a good idea to think ahead and carry condoms, dams, lube and gloves with you. These barriers can prevent unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections like HIV and hepatitis C.

Test your drugs

- **Why?** You can find out if your drugs are cut with other drugs (like fentanyl) or fillers (like levamisole) that could harm you.
- **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.

Try to eat

- **Why?** Some stimulants cause mouth dryness, sores, cracks, and teeth clenching.
- **How?** Drink water to keep yourself hydrated, and chew gum to keep your mouth moist and your teeth from grinding. Brushing your teeth can help control increased bacteria due to dry mouth. Use chapstick to prevent lip and mouth cracking.

Take care of your mouth

- **Why?** Some ways of using drugs are less risky to your health.
- **How?** Taking drugs by mouth is safer than smoking which is safer than shooting. If you smoke crack, you can use a crack condom for your pipe. You can get clean works at the People’s Harm Reduction Alliance or the King County Needle Exchange.

Choose safer ways to use

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 stimulants and depressants, like opioids, alcohol or benzos, 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?** 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.

Less is more

- **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 stimulants.
- **How?** Try a few hours of not using or introducing some nonuse days every week. Check in with a provider if you want to stop altogether.

Choose not to use

- **Why?** Only alcohol and benzo withdrawal, which causes the shakes, seizures or DTs-can be deadly. However, other drugs may have uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms.
- **How?** Ask your provider if you are worried about withdrawal or if you have HIV or are pregnant. They may be able to help with some of the symptoms.

Talk to a provider about withdrawal

For more information, contact the Harm Reduction Research and Treatment Center at 1 (855) 320-1004 or at harrtlab@uw.edu.