

Getting into treatment reduces the risk of overdose

Being put on a waiting list can be frustrating. But getting into (and staying in) treatment will reduce your risk of overdose.

Please don't give up.

Find out from your drug service what services are available to you while you're waiting for treatment.

Funding for this booklet has come from the National Treatment Agency known as the NTA (www.nta.nhs.uk) which has been set up to cut waiting times and improve access to, and the quality of, drug services.

The NTA has set targets to get waiting times down, and all services must move towards these targets as a matter of urgency.

Write to your local Drug Action Team, and ask them to look into the delay. Send a copy of your letter to your NTA regional manager. You can find out their addresses by ringing 0800 77 66 00.

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.

Using opiates 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 so without opiates like heroin or methadone, a dose that at one time wouldn't have touched you could kill you.

Getting into treatment reduces your risk.





Drug awareness

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 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 a 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.

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.

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.

Someone is unconscious they need an ambulance

If you are worried about the police coming, don't mention drugs when you dial 999. Tell them you've found someone unconscious and explain what has happened when the ambulance arrives.

Make sure there is no shouting or panic in the background when you dial 999 to reduce the chances of the police coming.

Remember: If you don't call an ambulance and someone dies, the police will always come so that they can inform relatives and investigate the death. If the person who died had been given an injection by someone else, there could be a charge of manslaughter.



Calling an ambulance saves lives

If the police in your area have a policy of coming to overdose calls, then you can ask your local Drug Action Team (DAT) to sort it out. 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.

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

If there isn't a drug user representative on the DAT, tell the drug service or needle exchange if you hear of the police coming to an overdose. They can then keep up pressure to change the policy.

Signs of an overdose

If someone has overdosed, put them in the recovery position and keep watching them.

Your need to know if they are asleep or unconscious.

You can find out by shouting or pinching their ear.

They are unconscious if you can't wake them or they are showing other signs of unconsciousness such as:

- **Snoring deeply**
- **Turning blue**
- **Not breathing**

Don't panic. Put them in the recovery position.

Dial 999 and ask for an ambulance.

Stay with them until the ambulance arrives.