

What is an overdose?



Overdose (OD) happens when a toxic amount of a drug, or combination of drugs overwhelms the body.

- People can overdose on lots of things, including alcohol.
- With opioid overdoses, surviving or dying wholly depends on breathing and oxygen.
- Opioid overdoses happen when there are so many opioids or a combination of opioids and other drugs in the body that the victim is not responsive to stimulation and/or breathing is inadequate.
- This happens because opioids fit into specific receptors that also affect the drive to breathe. If someone cannot breathe or is not breathing enough, the oxygen levels in the blood decrease and the lips and fingers turn blue- this is called cyanosis. This oxygen starvation eventually stops other vital organs like the heart, then the brain. This leads to unconsciousness, coma, and then death. Within 3-5 minutes without oxygen, brain damage starts to occur, soon followed by death.
- Stimulant overdose drugs like speed, cocaine, and ecstasy raise the heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature, and speed up breathing. This can lead to a seizure, stroke, heart attack or death.

Save a life! – Carry Naloxone / Narcan

These materials have been developed in collaboration with the Harm Reduction Coalition



Our Mission

We at the Sierra Harm Reduction Coalition (or SHRC) is providing an ever increasing suite of community based Harm Reduction services aimed to improve the quality of life in our county through helping our drug using community by reducing the consequences of drug use (HIV, HEP B/C, sexual disease, youth use and abuse, litter, etc.). We highly believe in the safety of our community. We greatly believe and respect the rights and feelings of our family who use drugs. To do this we provide free of charge mobile “where they’re at” drug and disease minimization services.

We believe that no one, despite their circumstances, should not be stigmatized. We are building a highly networked collaboration of service providers, such as treatment, mental health providers and other local community providers. Kit distribution, needle exchange, disease testing, disposal containers, naloxone training and referring to essential services are in our near future. Ultimately, our mission is to help our family who use drugs grow into essential members of our community.

We help each other help each other.

Contact Us

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Sierra Harm Reduction Coalition

Harm Reduction Services for
El Dorado County



Risks and Strategies to Prevent Overdose

Mixing - Most fatal overdoses are the result of poly-drug use

- Many overdoses occur when people mix heroin or prescription opioids and/or alcohol with benzodiazepines such as Klonopin, Valium, and Xanax.
- The risks are substantially increased because the drugs typically use different mechanisms in the body to create sedation or amping.
- A stimulant causes the body to use more oxygen while the depressant reduces the breathing rate.
- People who speedball usually inject more frequently with less time between shots than people who are using only heroin.

Tolerance – Know yourself and your using

- Tolerance develops over time, so the amount of a drug a long-time user needs to feel the drug's effects is a lot greater than a newer user.
- Tolerance changes depending on several factors including, weight, size, illness, stress, compromised immune system, and age.
- **Tolerance often decreases rapidly when someone has taken a break from using a drug whether intentionally – for example, while in drug treatment or on methadone detox – or unintentionally – for example, while in jail or the hospital.**

Quality - How pure, or strong

- Test the strength of the drug before you do the whole amount. Start small and work up.
- Try to buy from the same dealer so you have a better idea of what you're getting.
- Talk to others who have purchased from the same dealer.
- Know the pills you're taking and their interactions.
- Be careful when switching from one type of opioid pill to another.

Age and Physical Health

- Older people and/or those with longer drug using careers are at increased risk for fatal overdose because the cumulative effects of long-term substance use, which could include illnesses, like viral hepatitis or HIV or infections.
- Reduce the amount of every drug being taken.
- Try to avoid mixing alcohol with heroin/pills—this is an incredibly dangerous combination.
- If drinking or taking pills with heroin, do the heroin first to better gauge how high you are. Alcohol and especially benzos impair judgment so you may not remember or care how much you've used.
- Have a friend with you who knows what drugs you've taken and can respond in case of an emergency.

Modes of Administration

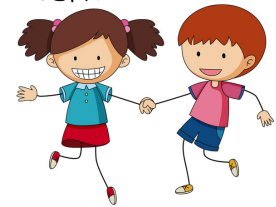
- Modes of administration that deliver the drug more quickly to the brain and are more likely to create a rush, such as intravenous injection and smoking also place people at higher risk for overdose.
- When someone switches the mode of administration that they are used to, it is harder to anticipate the effects.

Strategies & Tips

- Don't mix your drugs if you don't have to.
 - Know your tolerance.
 - Take care of your liver – if you have liver problems stay away from pharmaceuticals with a lot of acetaminophen in them, like Vicodin and Percocet.
 - Drink lots of water or other fluids and try to eat.
 - Carry your inhaler if you have asthma, tell your friends where it is, and that you have trouble breathing.
 - Go slow if you've been sick, lost weight, or have been feeling under the weather or weak—this can affect your tolerance.
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- Be mindful that injecting and smoking can mean increased risk.
 - Consider snorting, especially in cases when you're using alone or may have decreased tolerance.
 - If you inject, try and remove the tie after registering (flash of blood back in the syringe) and before injecting – this will allow you to better taste your shot and inject less if it feels too strong.
 - Be careful when changing modes of administration since you may not be able to handle the same amount.
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- Try to find a good, nonjudgmental doctor and get checked out for other health factors that increase your risk of stimulant overdose, like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease or other physical issues that could increase your risk for a stroke or heart attack hurt, the blood pressure will force the plunger backwards, the blood will look foamy, and it will take longer to stop the bleeding. If this happens, take the needle out right away.

**Never use
alone!**

Be there for your
friends, and they will
be there for you!



We help each other to help each other use safely