

# drug related emergencies



You may need to do different things to help someone in a drug related emergency, depending on their appearance and behaviour.

# Vomiting



Vomiting is usually nature's way of telling you that you've had too much. If somebody is feeling unwell through drink and drugs, don't give them anything to eat and only let them sip water (never force them to drink anything).

If after vomiting they want to sleep, let them but keep your eye on them. Make sure they are lying on their side (see the **recovery position** at the end of this leaflet).

## Bad trip/paranoia



If somebody is having a **bad trip**, is freaking out or **paranoid**, take them somewhere that is quiet where they feel safe (a low stimulus environment). Try to calm and reassure them ("it will pass – the drugs will wear off"). This can take hours, so be patient. If they become panicky and you notice them breathing very fast, get them to control their breathing by slowing it down or breathing into a paper bag.

If any of these disturbing experiences carry on after the drugs have worn off, they need to speak to a doctor or drug service.

## Chest pain



If they have chest pains: sit them down in a calm environment and reassure them. If the pain hasn't gone within 15 minutes or is severe, call an ambulance.

# Fits



If they are having a 'fit': make sure the area is safe and there is nothing they could hurt themselves on.

**Call an ambulance.**

Be sure to inform the paramedics if the fit stops and starts, if it doesn't stop within a couple of minutes or if the person turns blue.

# Overheating



Stimulant drugs such as ecstasy and M-cat raise your body temperature.

If you are using stimulant drugs; are dancing\* for long periods; are inside a hot club or outside in the sun your body can dangerously **overheat**.

Alcohol dehydrates you making you hotter still.

\* Some people have overheated on stimulants without dancing.

## **Avoid overheating by:**

- ❖ dressing in layers – removing clothes;
- ❖ if outside, use sunscreen, wear a hat – if inside take hats off ;
- ❖ carry a water bottle and drink up to a pint of water or non alcoholic drink an hour; chill out regularly and have a break from dancing.

## **Dealing with overheating**

If you or somebody you are with is overheating cool down by:

- ❖ removing outer clothing;
- ❖ splash them with water, use a wet cloth on skin;\*
- ❖ fan them;
- ❖ take them outside or somewhere cool;
- ❖ If they are conscious allow them to sip water or a non alcoholic drink.

## **Seek help or call an ambulance.**

\* Do not use very cold water, because it can make the blood vessels in the skin close, and prevent heat loss. Even lukewarm water is fine as it mimics the temperature of sweat, the body's natural way to reduce temperature.

# Serotonin syndrome



**Serotonin syndrome:** is triggered by drugs that can cause an overdose of serotonin, such as MDMA (ecstasy), the most severe cases involve interactions with other drugs.

**The main symptoms are:**

rigid, jerky, twitchy unusual movements, often involving the lower legs; shaking; fully dilated pupils; overheating; shivering; racing heart; appearing agitated and confused.

Serotonin syndrome can kill if it is not dealt with quickly. If in doubt, ring for an ambulance.



# Unconscious



If they can't be woken: (by shaking their shoulders and calling their name), or you notice a blueness of the skin, including lips or fingernails (or greyish for darker complexions) or they have trouble breathing, call an ambulance.

**Check breathing:** Check the airway and then breathing. If there is no breathing or it is abnormal (e.g. death rattle) then CPR should be attempted.

**Check there is nothing stuck in their throat** (vomit etc), if there is remove it. For vomit turn the head to the side and let gravity do its job. If that doesn't work turn their far shoulder towards you so that their mouth points towards the ground for 5 secs. If neither work don't waste time, start CPR or they will die quickly.

**CPR:** can be chest compressions alone. If you know how and feel able to, give 30 chest compressions followed by 2 rescue breaths. These compressions and rescue breaths are called 1 cycle of CPR and should be repeated.

**Recovery position:** If somebody is unconscious and then vomits while lying on their back, they can literally drown in it. That is why you should put an unconscious person who is still breathing into the recovery position.

Antidotes: if it is an opiate (e.g. heroin) overdose and there is naloxone available you should administer it as directed by its Patient Information Leaflet within the naloxone pack. It is perfectly legal for you to do so in an emergency.

# The Recovery Position



Put the hand closest to you by the head (as if they were waving)



Put the arm furthest away from you across the chest, so that the back of the hand rests against the cheek



Hold the hand in place and lift up the knee furthest away from you, making sure the foot is planted firmly on the ground



Turn them on their side by pushing down on their knee

“Look after friends who are in a mess with drink or drugs, in the same way you would want them to look after you.”

Never hesitate to **call an ambulance**.  
In most areas, the police are only called to overdoses if there is a death or an under 16 involved.

Read this booklet so you know what to do.

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**[>]** aims  
To highlight common drug related emergencies and offer practical advice on how to deal with them.

**[>]** audience  
People who use drugs, their friends and relatives.

**[v]** content  
No swearing.

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