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DEALING WITH DRUG RELATED EMERGENCIES



Harm reduction can reduce the risks associated with taking drugs and drinking alcohol but cannot remove them completely. A drug-related emergency might be affecting someone's physical health, or it might affect their mental health. Both should be taken seriously.

Someone's health might be affected if they have a bad reaction to a drug or alcohol, they have taken different drugs at the same time, they have taken too much of a drug, the drugs they have taken have brought on or made an existing health condition worse, or they have injured themselves whilst under the influence.

- **Overdoses of depressant drugs often involve breathing difficulties**
- **Overdoses of stimulant drugs can involve heart attacks or fits.**

You may need to do different things to help someone, depending on their appearance and behaviour.

STAY WITH THEM

Stay with them and check on them regularly. If they are very worried or distressed, sit them somewhere calm and give reassurance.

CALL 999

If someone is unconscious, having a seizure or not breathing normally, call 999.

Give as much information as possible including location, age, gender, what has happened and be honest about what they have taken.

MAKE SPACE

If they are having a seizure (fitting), keep the area safe and move anything that could hurt them.

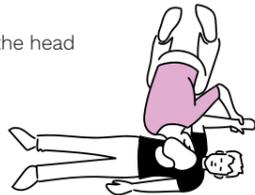
If you are on a dancefloor, get someone to stop the music, turn up the lights and clear a space.



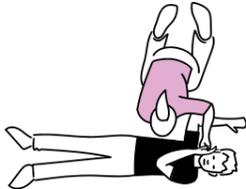
RECOVERY POSITION

If they are unconscious, put them in the recovery position (or on their side) and monitor breathing.

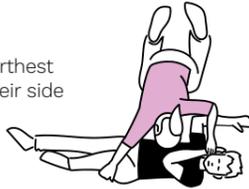
1. Put the hand closest to you by the head (as if they were waving).



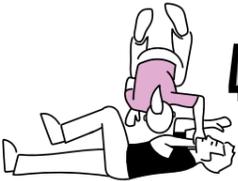
2. Put the arm furthest away from you across the chest, so that the back of the hand rests against the cheek.



3. Hold the hand and lift up the knee furthest away from you, then turn them on their side by pushing down on their knee.



4. Open their airway by gently tilting their head back and lifting their chin, and check that nothing is blocking their airway.



Scan for full details of the recovery position:



UNRESPONSIVE

Are they responsive? Gently shake their shoulders. Ask them questions,

“What happened?”
“Open your eyes.”



If they open their eyes or give a gesture, they are responsive

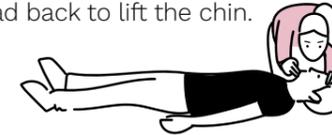
If they do not respond in any way, they need treatment as fast as possible.

If the casualty is not responsive, remember your **ABC's**. Scan for full details of the primary survey:



AIRWAY

Is the airway open and clear? Open the airway by placing one hand on the forehead and with the other hand gently tilt the head back to lift the chin.



BREATHING

Are they breathing normally?

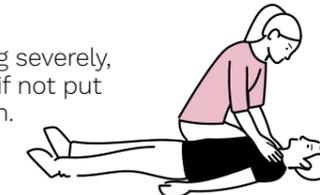
Place your ear above their mouth, looking down at their body. Listen for sounds of breathing and see if you can feel their breath on your cheek. Watch to see if their chest moves. Do this for 10 seconds.

If they are not breathing you need to do CPR. Whilst waiting for the ambulance to arrive.



CIRCULATION

Are they bleeding? If bleeding severely, put pressure on the wound, if not put them in the recovery position.



DON'T DO THESE

- **Inflict excessive pain to wake them**
- **Give them any other drugs**
- **Encourage them to vomit**
- **Give them anything to eat or drink (apart from small sips of water)**
- **Put them in a bath/shower**
- **Walk them about or attempt to restrain them**

Turn over for our guide to spotting signs of a drug related emergency.



WHAT TO DO IN A DRUGS EMERGENCY

BRISTOL NIGHTS

Bristol Nights



Scan QR code to learn more about harm reduction and drug safety.

Always call 999 in an emergency
Its time to act if you see these symptoms

SEIZURE (FITTING)

If they are having a seizure (fitting), keep the area safe. Move anything that could hurt them - tables, chairs or people. Get someone to stop the music, turn up the lights and clear a space.

DON'T try to restrain them. Only move them if they are in immediate danger.

- Cushion their head if they're on the ground
- Loosen any tight clothing around their neck, such as a collar or tie, to aid breathing
- Turn them on to their side after their convulsions stop into the Recovery Position

Call an ambulance. Tell the paramedics if the fit stops and starts, if it doesn't stop within a couple of minutes or if the person turns blue.

UNCONSCIOUS

Call an ambulance if:

- They can't be woken by shaking shoulders and calling their name
- You notice a blueness of the skin, including lips and fingernails (or greyish for darker complexions)
- They have trouble breathing

Check there is nothing stuck in their throat (e.g. vomit), 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.

You should put an unconscious person who is still breathing into the recovery position, if they vomit while lying on their back, they can swallow their vomit and drown in it.

BAD TRIP OR PARANOIA

If somebody is having a bad trip, is freaking out or paranoid, take them somewhere quiet where they feel safe. 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 or are breathing very fast, get them to control their breathing by slowing it down or breathing into a paper bag.

NALOXONE

If it is an opiate (eg. heroin) overdose and there is naloxone available, it is legal for you to administer if in an emergency. Naloxone saves lives. Bristol Drugs Project has free training on opiate overdoses and administering Naloxone.



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 & confused

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

CHEST PAIN OR RAPID HEART RATE

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.

OVERHEATING

Stimulant drugs such as ecstasy raise body temperature. Alcohol dehydrates you making you hotter still. If people have taken stimulant drugs; are dancing for long periods; are inside a hot club or outside in the sun their body can dangerously overheat. Some people have overheated on stimulants without dancing.

If the person is overheating, try to cool them down. Take them outside or somewhere cool, remove outer layers of clothing and use damp cloths.

DON'T use ice cold water. If they are conscious, allow them to sip water or a non alcoholic drink.

VOMITING

Vomiting is usually nature's way of telling you've had too much. If somebody is feeling unwell 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.

ABNORMAL BREATHING

If they are not breathing or have abnormal breathing (e.g. raspy breath) – start CPR and call an ambulance.

