

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Alcohol

Alcohol is a depressant – it slows your body and mind down. Not everyone manages the same amount of alcohol in the same way, and effects vary depending on how much is taken. Common effects can include feeling relaxed, loss of inhibitions, reduced co-ordination and concentration, slurred speech, intense moods and impaired decision making.

Binge Drinking

With pubs and clubs as popular social and meeting places, drinking is common in the LGBT community. Binge drinking is common among gay, bisexual and MSM and can cause major problems.

Binge drinking in Ireland is considered to be six standard alcoholic drinks or more in one sitting. In the recent MISI (men who have sex with men internet survey) data showed that 58% of respondents reported that they binge drink on a typical drinking occasion.

Many feel that they can be themselves when they drink, while others find alcohol a way to block out disturbing memories or thoughts. Or perhaps it's less complicated than that and simply about keeping up with our friends, or having fun and not being aware of how much you are consuming. But before long, drinking can affect our work, sleep, relationships and responsibilities.

Knowing how to have fun safely can be a learned skill. Being embarrassed about your behaviour or not being able to remember the night before, getting into arguments, or having risky sexual encounters, can all be avoided if you re-learn some drinking behaviour.

Often counselling can help to address underlying issues and can equip us better to handle certain issues without needing a drink to do so. Check out our support & services section for more information including counselling an Alcoholics Anonymous groups.

Risks

Alcohol reduces inhibitions and intensifies moods such as sadness and anger.

Poor decision making and unsafe choices, such as unprotected sex, saying or doing things you later regret, or drink driving.

Memory loss – like not remembering what you said or did.

Larger amounts can cause overdose – vomiting, passing out or even death.

Physical harms such as damaging your brain, liver, heart and kidneys, or being injured from fights, crashes, falls.

Being drunk can make you vulnerable and less able to defend yourself if someone tries to hurt you or take advantage of you.

Dependence can occur, where your body starts to rely on alcohol to get by.

Tips to Consider

Start with a non-alcoholic drink and some food. Try to space out alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks.

Pace yourself – keep track of how much you're drinking. Stick to standards.

In Ireland, a standard drink is the equivalent of 1 pub measure (35.5ml) of spirits or small glass of wine (100ml) or a half pint of Stout / Large / Cider.

One standard drink contains roughly 10 grams of pure alcohol, taking the average person about one hour to process although this will vary from person to person.

Try to keep it under 4 standard drinks and have alcohol free days every week.

Aim for one drink per hour. Avoid buying in rounds.

Keep an eye on your booze. Don't leave it unattended. Drink spiking does happen.

Carry condoms and lube with you if you plan (or happen) to hook up while drinking.

Watch your moods – if you are getting too loud, upset or angry – slow down and chill out for a bit.

Avoid other drugs – including smoking. Mixing types of alcohol (eg wine then beer) or using other drugs increases your risk of losing control.

Plan how you are getting home. Tell friends where you are going.

If you hook-up and go home with someone, remember that you don't have to have sex if you're feeling too drunk or just don't want to anymore.

Plan for tomorrow – sleep, drink lots of water, eat well to help your body recover.

If you wake up the next day and can't remember the night before, check out our advice here.

Support & Services

Alcohol information and national directory of support services, available at www.drugs.ie or from the HSE Drugs and Alcohol Helpline: Freefone 1800 459459

Poppers

Poppers are nitrite-based drugs that cause blood vessels to relax and expand when they are inhaled. They produce a light-headed and dizzy feeling. The effects usually only last a few minutes. Some men like to use them during sex because they intensify pleasure and also help relax the anal sphincter muscles. Others find that they don't enjoy the effects at all, that they get more of a headache than a pleasurable rush.

Risks

Use of poppers is associated with an increased risk of acquiring HIV infection among MSM, particularly for the bottom. This is because using poppers opens your blood vessels wider and causes more blood to flow to your rectum, allowing for more of an opportunity for HIV to enter your bloodstream.

Poppers effects blood pressure. Many people have lost consciousness and passed out.

Poppers can interact with other drugs, especially Viagra. This has caused people to collapse and could result in death.

Swallowing it will cause poisoning and severe sickness. It also burns if it touches someone's skin.

Poppers are flammable and should not be used near candles, lighters or cigarettes.

Support and Services

Further information & support services at http://www.drugs.ie/drugtypes/drug/poppers_stimulant or from the drugs helpline: Freefone 1800459 459

G / GHB / GBL

G is a drug which can give you a high with small doses and sedation with only slightly higher doses. Taking G can result in feelings of euphoria, reduced inhibitions and drowsiness. G is commonly sold in plastic bottles or containers.

Effects

The effects will vary from person to person and will depend on how much is consumed. A euphoric dose for one person may be a sedative dose for another.

The effects can begin about 20 minutes after consuming and may last up to four hours. A dose of G can make a person feel chilled out, horny, and/or mildly high. Too much G can leave a person dizzy, confused, drowsy or vomiting. G use can also result in seizures, coma and death.

Dependence

G is physically addictive and dependence can develop very quickly or from regular use over a period of time. Dependence can mean that people will experience withdrawal symptoms when you reduce or stop using, which can be severe or life threatening.

In certain situations, people may require inpatient treatment for G dependence. It is not advised that a person suddenly stops taking G themselves or attempts to self-detox. Withdrawal should be a slow, tapered process, with medical supervision of a doctor.

Going Under

With G, there's only a small difference in the dose that produces the 'desired effect' and the dose which could result in 'going under'. Basically, it is very easy to overdose on G.

G has a delayed onset which means it can take longer than expected to kick in. An additional risk is that someone may take a dose, think nothing is happening, and then take another dose. This can lead to going under accidentally.

Common signs of overdose can include: confusion; vomiting; dizziness; seizure; temperature; agitation; hallucination; difficulty breathing and coma.

Sexual Assault & Consent

G is increasingly used as a drug to facilitate sex. G can leave a person incoherent or comatose (gone under), so they are unable to give their sexual consent. Whether a person unknowingly or willingly takes G, they are at risk of sexual assault. This can mean that people who use G in clubs or at sex parties are at risk of assault.

Safer Sex Advice

Using G can increase a person's sex drive, this may increase the chances of having unprotected sex and increasing the risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Be prepared – carry condoms with you – particularly if you know you will be using G. Only use a condom once. Never reuse it. Get tested regularly for HIV and other STIs.

7 Tips for Safe G Use

It is always safest not to take unknown or illicit drugs. However, if you do decide to take G, remember:

1. Always use as low a dose of G as possible and wait 4 hours before re-dosing.
2. Never swig from the bottle or accept pre-prepared G from someone else.
3. Avoid mixing with alcohol. Mix G with water, soft drinks or juice.
4. Avoid using G with other drugs.
5. As unconsciousness can occur, try to have one sober friend or one friend who isn't using G.
6. Use with people you can trust in a safe environment.
7. G increases libido and lowers inhibitions, so always carry extra condoms.

Support and Services

List of services and further information at www.drugs.ie/ghb or from the drugs helpline: Freefone 1800 459 459 or

download leaflet here (g leaflet)

Ketamine

Ketamine or K is a powerful anaesthetic which can stop you feeling pain. It comes in a powder or liquid form. It can be snorted, injected and consumed in drinks. The effects aren't long lasting but Ketamine can cause a loss of feeling in the body and a paralysis of the muscles. Users report an "out of body" experience which is often referred to as a "K-Hole". Due to the dreamlike state it puts users in ketamine has been used as a "date rape" drug. It can cause hallucinations and a "trip" can last from half an hour to several hours.

Risks

If you're under the influence of K you could be vulnerable to others who may take advantage of you sexually.

You might feel confused, agitated or experience panic attacks which could make you vulnerable in an unfamiliar environment.

People can develop depression and anxiety after using ketamine, risking their long-term health.

Ketamine can cause serious bladder problems in regular users. They can have trouble passing urine and when they do it can be painful. In some cases, the damage to the bladder is so bad it has to be removed by surgery. The urinary tract from the kidneys down to the bladder can also be affected badly.

Support & Services

Further information & services at <http://www.drugs.ie/drugtypes/drug/ketamine>

or from the drugs helpline: Freefone 1800459 459

Crystal Meth

Methamphetamines, also known as "crystal meth", is part of the amphetamine family of stimulant drugs. It is a commonly used drug on the scene in the US and UK and is ever increasing in Ireland. Usually crystal meth is smoked in glass pipes in a similar way to crack cocaine. It can be injected; and some people snort or swallow it.

Crystal meth is highly addictive. Some of the effects people experience when using include euphoria, increased energy, alertness, happiness and increased sex drive. The effects may last as long as 12 hours. For these reasons Crystal Meth is being used more frequently on the chemsex scene.

Risks

If you're under the influence of K you could be vulnerable to others who may take advantage of you sexually.

You might feel confused, agitated or experience panic attacks which could make you vulnerable in an unfamiliar environment.

Injecting, 'shooting-up' or 'slamming' crystal meth can lead to inflamed / collapsed veins, track lines, skin infections and infections of the heart which can lead to heart attacks. (See our safer injecting guide)

Sharing needles can heighten the chances of getting or transmitting infectious diseases such as HIV & Hepatitis C.

Increased blood pressure, body temperature and heart rate which could all lead to heart attacks.

Addiction. Once people start using crystal meth they find it difficult to stop.

Withdrawal symptoms such as depression, which can also lead to difficulty in finding pleasure in anything other than using drugs.

“Meth Mouth”, where teeth rapidly decay and fall out.

Drug-related psychosis which can last for months or years after you’ve stopped using

Support & Services

Further information & services at http://www.drugs.ie/drugtypes/drug/methamphetamine_stimulant_hallucinogen or from the drugs helpline: Freefone 1800459 459

Cocaine

Cocaine is a stimulant which temporarily speeds up the way your mind and body work but the effects are short-lived. Cocaine is more commonly snorted whilst crack cocaine is generally smoked in a pipe.

Crack tends to have a much stronger effect and can be more addictive than snorting cocaine. Cocaine and crack both effect the levels of dopamine in the brain (a natural chemical which is released when we are happy or having a pleasurable experience) which give users a high. However, long term use of these drugs mean that we have less dopamine in our brains leading to low mood and even depression.

The effects of cocaine/crack can include feeling confident, alert and energised, however the come down after using can result in not being able to sleep, feeling agitated and low mood.

Risks

It raises body temperature and makes the heart beat faster which can lead to heart attacks.

If you share pipes or notes (tubes) to snort with there is a possibility of transmitting blood borne viruses such as HIV or hepatitis C.

The come down can leave users feeling tired and run down. In some cases, feelings of depression after using can lead to thoughts of self-harm and/or suicide.

Support & Services

Further information & services at <http://www.drugs.ie/drugtypes/drug/cocaine> or from the drugs helpline: Freefone 1800 459 459

NPS (incl. Mephedrone)

Legal highs or New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) are substances designed to produce the same or similar effects to drugs such as cocaine and ecstasy but are structurally different enough to avoid being controlled under the legislation. Legal highs cannot be sold for human consumption so they are often sold as bath salts, incense, plant food or advertised as “not for human consumption” to get around the law. The packaging may describe a list of ingredients but you cannot be sure that is what the product will contain.

Just because a substance is sold as ‘legal’ doesn’t mean that it’s safe or legal. You can’t really be sure of what’s in a ‘legal high’ you’ve bought, or been given, or what effect it’s likely to have on you or your friends. We know that many ‘legal highs’ have been linked to poisoning, emergency hospital admissions including in mental health services and, in some cases, deaths.

Legal high harm reduction advice

Start low and go slow. Start with a really small amount. Wait at least an hour before deciding whether or not to take more.

If you snort, chop powders finely first. Don’t inject, but if you do, don’t share works with other people.

Only use one drug at a time – mixing with other drugs can have unpleasant and dangerous side effects.

Don’t use alone – do it with other people you trust and choose a safe environment in which to use.

If you are using an NPS like Mephedrone for sex, remember to carry and use condoms.

Support & Services

Further information on legal highs & other drugs at <http://www.drugs.ie/drugtypes/> or the 'Snow Blow' Poster: <http://www.drugs.ie/downloadDocs/2017/Mephedrone-Poster-High-Res-March-2017.pdf> or 'Spice' poster: <http://www.drugs.ie/downloadDocs/2017/Cannabinoids-Poster-High-Res-March-2017.pdf> or contact the drugs helpline: Freefone 1800 459 459

Cannabis

Cannabis is usually smoked although some people put it in food such as cakes or brownies.

The effects of cannabis can be feeling chilled out, happy and relaxed. In some cases, it can make you hallucinate so you may see, hear or feel things in a different way to normal.

People often think that cannabis is safe because it's natural, however there are risks associated with the use of any kind of drug.

Risks

Cannabis affects how your brain works. It can make you feel very anxious and even paranoid, it can make it difficult for you to concentrate and learn, make your memory worse and make you feel less motivated.

Tobacco and cannabis have both been linked to lung diseases like tuberculosis and lung cancer.

Using cannabis has also been linked, in some people, to serious, long-term mental health problems including depression, anxiety and psychosis.

Support & Services

Further information & services at <http://www.drugs.ie/drugtypes/drug/cannabis> or from the drugs helpline: Freefone 1800 459 459

Chemsex

Chemsex is a specific form of recreational drug use and involves using one or more of three drugs, in any combination, to facilitate or enhance sex, with or without other drugs.

The three common drugs used are:

- Methamphetamine (Crystal, Crystal Meth, Tina, Meth)
- Mephedrone (meph, drone, M-Cat, Meow-Meow)
- GHB/GBL (G, Gina, Liquid E)

Chemsex commonly refers to sex that can sometimes last for several days where there is little need for sleep or food. The heightened sexual focus enables more extreme sex, for longer, often with more partners.

Men may engage in Chemsex for many reasons, some include:

- To feel more sexually free
- To overcome fear of rejection / shame / stigma
- Wanting 'better' sex, that lasts longer
- Seeking intimacy
- To connect with others
- To feel part of a group or community

Chemsex is associated with extreme disinhibition. Some people use Chemsex to do things they might otherwise not usually do. Safer sex can be less important to those under the influence and therefore the chances of transmission of HIV and STIs are greatly enhanced.

As with the use of other recreational drugs, engaging in Chemsex can affect our choices and our judgement. Some people may feel unable to consent to sex when highly intoxicated. Be aware of your limits and your right to say no to sex or sexual acts that you don't feel comfortable with. A good way of achieving this is by setting boundaries before engaging in Chemsex.

Plan in advance – carry condoms and lube and do not share injecting equipment.

Drug interactions can be serious and difficult to predict, for example between alcohol and GHB/GNL. Side effects from the drugs used for Chemsex can be more severe than other commonly used recreational drugs.

Short and long term side effects can include:

- Paranoia
- Psychosis
- Chronic depression
- Anxiety
- Weight loss
- Going-under / unconsciousness
- Coma / death

Tips on safer chemsex

- Get screened for STIs regularly including HIV and hepatitis C
- Don't let someone else inject drugs for you.
- Play with someone you trust if possible, as your judgment can be dramatically impaired on chem drugs.
- Establish a set of boundaries while sober about what you are not prepared to do sexually that you can refer to later when high.
- Don't play for too long – paranoia and hallucinations can be common on your second day awake.
- Do not share needles, or other injecting equipment. Clean needles can be obtained from your local needle exchange. Check out our safer injecting practices page and please speak to a health advisor at your local sexual health clinic as chemsex puts you at higher risk of infections.
- If you're HIV negative, and concerned about any HIV risks during a chemsex episode, check out our information about PEP, a medicine which can help protect you from becoming positive if taken within 72 hours of the possible exposure.
- If you're looking to spend your evenings/weekends/spare time differently, reach out to some of the support helplines and/or counselling services listed on our website. There are a number of alternative sporting, social and recreational activities, specifically for gay men which may help you break habits of chemsex use.
- Don't play too regularly if you want to avoid depression, weight loss and psychological dependence. Change up your sex life with some sober sex, some dating and plenty of non-sexual recreation and intimacy.

Are you slamming / injecting drugs?

If you are injecting or 'slamming' your drugs, it is important to know how to do it in the safest possible way. Merchants Quay Ireland have created a booklet on safer injecting practices which you can download here. It includes information on safer injecting practices and types of injecting. Advice on how to find a vein and the equipment that should be used.

Recommendations on how to best care for your veins, avoiding vein damage and when you may need to seek help.

Support & Services

Information on the drugs mentioned above and other drugs and services including 'free needle/equipment exchanges' at www.drugs.ie or from the drugs helpline: Freefone 1800 459 459

For Sexual Health, STI & HIV Services such as the; GMHS Outreach Team, Gay Switchboard Ireland and HIV Ireland <http://man2man.ie/testing-support/>

Safer Injecting

If you are injecting or 'slamming' your drugs, it is important to know how to do it in the safest possible way. Merchants Quay Ireland have created a booklet on safer injecting practices which you can download here. It includes information on safer injecting practices and types of injecting. Advice on how to find a vein and the equipment that should be used.

Recommendations on how to best care for your veins, avoiding vein damage and when you may need to seek help.

Tips on safe injecting

Get your own injecting equipment from your local needle exchange. Injecting equipment means needles, syringes, water, spoons, filters and any other aspect of injecting paraphernalia.

Use your own equipment once only and dispose of it carefully.

Don't lend or borrow used equipment to or from anybody (including sexual partners).

Don't inject alone. Try to do it with other people around, and try to make sure you all know what to do in an emergency.

Viruses can also live in snorting equipment e.g. straws. Don't share these when snorting your drugs.

Support & Services

List of support services including free needle and equipment exchanges at www.drugs.ie or from the drugs helpline:

Freefone 1800 459 459