



SAFER USE STRATEGIES: DEPRESSANTS

Depressants are “downers” and include opioids, benzos, and barbiturates. They can be prescribed like Oxy, Vicodin, and Xanax, or street drugs like heroin. Here are some tips to help you stay safer and healthier no matter how you choose to change your use. Using safer does not mean that you remove all risks, including death, but it can help reduce substance-related harm. You are worth it!

<i>Ways to be safer and healthier without changing use</i>	Carry rescue drugs	WHY? Opioids like heroin, fentanyl, and Oxys can lead to overdose. HOW? Use the buddy system when you use opioids. Carry naloxone (Narcan) with you and give it to people who are near you when you use. It reverses overdose, but not for some drugs (Tranq, benzos). Check out nextdistro.org and neverusealone.com for info and support.
	Test your drugs	WHY? You can be more aware if your drugs are cut with other drugs or fillers that could harm you. Note: Current methods are not fail-safe. HOW? Talk to providers about getting a urine drug testing kit and testing liquids before you use. For pills/powders, check out dancesafe.org for testing kits. Some syringe service programs have more accurate drug testing.
	Nurture your body	WHY? Depressants can dull your appetite, can take a physical toll when used in larger amounts. HOW? Try to eat nutritious foods, water before/during use. For people who don't get strung out: Let your body rest for at least a day before using again; try to take as many days off as you used for.
	Take care of your veins	WHY? If you are shooting drugs, you can take care of your veins. HOW? Drink water, rotate injection sites, check out the Getting Off manual.
<i>Ways to use more safely</i>	Choose safer ways of using	WHY? Some ways of using drugs are less risky to your health. HOW? Taking drugs orally is often safer than snorting or smoking which is safer than shooting. Snorting opioids has a greater risk of overdose than smoking.
	Shoot safer	WHY? Avoid overdose, blood-borne illness (HIV, hep C), bacterial infections. HOW? Pace yourself until you know the strength of your stash. Shooting into arm or hand veins is safer than hitting blind into your groin or neck. Rotate sites, shoot downstream if possible. Using new, clean needles and works can help prevent blood-borne illnesses and other infections.
	Avoid mixing drugs	WHY? Using different drugs at the same time can have unexpected effects, put stress on your heart, and lead to overdose. HOW? Know the risks of combining. Use one drug at a time if you're unsure.
	Use with safe people in a safe place	WHY? Depressants can cause sleepiness, confusion, and lowered inhibitions. People can hurt or take advantage of you when you're high. HOW? Avoid using with people you don't know or trust. Use where you feel safe and in control of surroundings. Do not drive or bike when you are high.
<i>Ways to change how much you use</i>	Less is more	WHY? You can avoid overdosing or experiencing drugs' toxic effects. HOW? You can decide how you want to limit your use (e.g., buy only a certain amount; set a spending limit). Leave the rest of your money at home or in a safe place. You might as a trusted friend to remind you of your limit.
	Choose not to use	WHY? Not using—even for a few hours or days—gives your body a rest and may help you avoid your body or mind becoming dependent on depressants. HOW? If you are not yet dependent and don't get strung out, try to not use for long periods of time and take days off from use every week to avoid getting hooked. Check in with your provider if you want to stop altogether.
	Talk to a provider about withdrawal	WHY? Alcohol/benzo withdrawal can be life-threatening. Withdrawal from other depressants can make you feel sick. It can affect unborn babies, and people with certain illnesses more severely. HOW? Talk to your provider if you are cutting down or stopping. There are some effective medications to help prevent overdose and relieve craving and withdrawal.