

## INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

A Needle and Syringe Program (NSP or the exchange) worker can give you information, help you find services and make appointments for you.

### DirectLine

1800 888 236 • [www.directline.org.au](http://www.directline.org.au)  
24-hour. If you want to talk to someone about your drug use or find a support service.

Your GP will also be able to give you support and advice.

DHHS Needle and Syringe Program information  
To find a Needle and Syringe Program near you, search 'needle syringe program'.

SAFER  
USING 08

PILLS

AND

MEDICINES

## PILLS AND MEDICINES

Using medicines in ways other than directed can be harmful or dangerous.

These ways can include:

- + Using medicine prescribed for someone else
- + Taking medicine at a higher dose or more often than prescribed or recommended
- + Snorting or injecting medicine that is made to be swallowed
- + Using medicine extracted from patches, or using lots of patches at the same time
- + Combining medicines or using them while drinking alcohol.

## OPIOID MEDICINES

Opioid medicines like methadone, morphine, oxycodone and codeine are depressant drugs. This means they slow down (or depress) the messages from your brain to your body.

If you take too much of these kinds of medicines, or you combine them with other depressants like benzos or alcohol, the message your brain sends to your body telling it to breathe can slow down.

Your breathing can become dangerously slow or stop altogether.

## FENTANYL

Fentanyl is a very potent drug, many times stronger than morphine or heroin.

It is often extracted from patches and there are reports of fentanyl being used to increase the effect of heroin and other drugs.

It works quickly and can rapidly stop your breathing.

Fentanyl is a high-risk opioid on its own. When combined with other depressant drugs, even tiny amounts have caused fatal overdose.

Agency details:

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posed by model

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## NALOXONE

[Naloxone temporarily reverses the effects of opioid overdose which will allow the person to breathe again.](#)

If you use opioid drugs like heroin or morphine you should speak to an NSP worker to find out more about naloxone.

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[There is more information on naloxone in this series in the brochure titled 'Overdose'.](#)

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## OTHER DEPRESSANT DRUGS

Benzos like Valium or antipsychotic drugs like Seroquel are often used by people for their sedative effect, for anxiety or sleep problems or to help with coming down from other drugs.

Depressants can cause:

- Euphoria
- Impaired thinking and memory loss
- Blurred or double vision
- Impaired coordination, falls and dizziness.

Using these drugs in ways other than prescribed, or with other drugs, can cause harm including increasing the risk of overdose.

Benzodiazepine pills are hard to dissolve, which means that swallowing is less harmful than injecting as the undissolved bits of the pill will damage your veins.

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If you are on methadone or Suboxone® and you regularly start nodding off or feel like you're hanging out, you should speak to your doctor about your dose.

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## INJECTING

Many pills and tablets contain powdered talc, corn starch and other materials (fillers) that do not dissolve in water. If injected, filler material can lodge in the lungs, liver and eyes, and block blood vessels.

Injecting crushed pills like Endone® or MS Contin® can cause blocked and collapsed veins as well as infections.

Injecting a tablet that has been in anyone's mouth, including your own, can cause infection in the eyes or bloodstream.

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[If you are going to inject pills or any other drugs, it's important to use filters to reduce the risks from injecting filler materials.](#)

[Using a filter will reduce the risk of dirty hits and vein damage.](#)

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## FILTERING

Some filters are better than others. Things like swabs, cotton wool and tampons are often used as filters, but they are not sterile and won't filter some of the harmful stuff from the mix. Using cotton wool as a filter can result in injection of cotton fibres. Plan ahead so you're not stuck for a filter.

## WHEEL FILTERS

The best filter to use when injecting pills is a wheel filter that can filter out particles of crushed pills that might lodge in body tissues and cause a reaction.

Some wheel filters can also filter out some of the bigger bacteria but not viruses like hep C, hep B or HIV so safer injecting is still important.

Wheel filters are available at some NSPs but you might have to pay for them.

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[You won't lose your drugs by using a wheel filter – just the fillers.](#)

[There is information on safer injecting in the brochure titled 'Injecting'.](#)

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## CODEINE

Some pills that contain codeine, like Nurofen Plus® also have other painkillers in them like paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin, which means that if you take them you'll be getting high doses of these drugs too.

In high or repeated doses these drugs can damage your stomach, kidneys and liver.

Paracetamol is highly toxic to the liver in large doses. If you think someone has overdosed on paracetamol call 000 straight away.

## OVER-THE-COUNTER (OTC) MEDICINES

These are types of medicine you can buy without a prescription at a pharmacy or supermarket.

They include things like cough medicines, some pain killers and allergy medicine.

They may seem safe but many of these medicines contain things that can be dangerous if not used correctly or may interact with something else you are taking.

Always stick to the directions and if in doubt, speak to a pharmacist.