

## OLDER PEOPLE AND DRUG USE

Whether you have been using for a long time or have started more recently, as you get older there are some things you should think about.

## LOOKING AFTER YOUR VEINS

As you get older your veins tend to become stiffer and less elastic which can cause problems with blood flow and injecting. Scar tissue may have built up over time, making it harder to find a good place to inject.

Looking after your veins will reduce injecting problems.

Keeping hydrated, getting regular exercise, and trying to eat as well as you can will make it easier to find a vein and help you stay healthy.

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There is more information on vein care in the brochure titled 'Veins'.

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## 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 doctor will be able to give you support and advice.

### Better Health Channel

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)  
Health advice and service directory.

### Harm Reduction Victoria

(03) 9329 1500 • [www.hrvic.org](http://www.hrvic.org)

Agency details:

SAFER  
USING 09

# OLDER PEOPLE AND DRUG USE

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## OVERDOSE

Your tolerance to alcohol or other drugs can be reduced as you get older, putting you at risk of overdose. Sometimes you might be prescribed pain killers or other medicines which can add to the risk.

Health conditions affecting your kidneys, liver, lungs or smoking-related illnesses can also increase the chance of overdose.

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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Naloxone is medicine that temporarily reverses the effects of opioid overdose, which will allow the person to breathe again.

There is more information on overdose and naloxone in the brochure titled 'Overdose'.

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## DRUG TREATMENT

If you want to make changes to your drug use, cut down, stop or get more control, there are many services in Victoria that can help. It's worth thinking about trying again even if you've tried in the past and it didn't work out. It can take many attempts to reach where you want to be.

A good place to start is to speak to the NSP worker or ring DirectLine on 1800 888 236.

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There is more information in the brochures titled 'Cutting Down, Getting Off' and 'Methadone and Suboxone®'.

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## PAIN RELIEF

If you have been using opioid drugs for a long time and need pain relief, the medicine you are given may not be enough to manage your pain.

Using more than the prescribed amount of medicine, or topping up with other drugs like heroin can add to the risk of overdose.

Speak to your doctor if medicine you're taking isn't dealing with your pain.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

**Drink plenty of water throughout the day.** Keeping hydrated will help you stay healthy and will also make it easier to find a vein.

**Try to eat a healthy diet.** Eating as well as you can will keep your energy levels up and help prevent you from getting sick.

**Exercise.** Regular moderate exercise like walking, swimming and cycling are good ways to stay fit.

**Get regular check-ups.** Regular appointments with a doctor can help you stay healthy. These will also give you an opportunity if you want to talk about your drug use and where to get any support you might need.

**Smoking.** Smoking isn't just expensive, it's very damaging to your health. If you smoke cigarettes and you're thinking about quitting, call Quitline on 13 78 48 or visit [www.quit.org.au](http://www.quit.org.au).

## HEP C

The longer you have hep C, the more chance there is that it will affect your health.

If you have a history of injecting, you should consider finding out your hep C status and whether you need treatment.

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There are new hep C treatments that are:

+ Easy to take

+ Have fewer side effects

+ Much more successful than the older treatments.

There is more information in the brochure titled 'Hep C'.

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## MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Many people experience mental health problems like depression and anxiety.

Sometimes there's a definite reason why people feel down and sometimes it's hard to work out why.

Feeling alone or sad a lot could be a sign that you have anxiety or are depressed.

Either way it's a good idea to speak to someone about this as soon as you can.

It can be difficult to talk about things like this, but depression and anxiety are health conditions that can be treated.

Your doctor or an agency like Beyond Blue can help you find support for these issues.

If you don't feel comfortable going to your doctor, you can call Beyond Blue 24-hours, 7-days on 1300 22 4636.

## MONEY

If you are struggling with money or housing, an NSP worker can help connect you with services.

If you can't speak to a NSP worker, you can ring DirectLine or you can speak to your local council to find out what services are in your area.