



Student Wellness Centre

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UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

Thinking about your substance use.

Substances have been a part of human culture since the beginning of time. If you are thinking of using...

Think about why you want to use: It's best **not to use** substances as a way of coping with problems. If you find you are using to cope, try talking to a health professional or someone you trust.

Think about your mental health: If you or a family member has a history of mental health concerns, substance use can trigger or worsen symptoms. Avoid using to cope with a mental health concern and talk to a health professional before use.

Harm Reduction and No Judgement tips

Keeping Safe: If using any substance, safety should be the main priority. Make sure the environment, company, and substances used are as safe as possible and you have access to help if needed.

Know Your Source: Whether your substance is legal or illegal, be sure that it comes from someone you trust.

The Buddy System: It's always preferable to have someone you know and trust with you if you are using a substance. Your buddy can assist you if you need help.

One substance at a time: Combining substances may cause stronger and more unpredictable reactions. Alcohol is likely to intensify the effects of other substances which can lead to negative experiences and even significant health concerns.

Know the Signs of an Overdose: Overdoses can look different from one person to the next and depending on the substance. Any overdose or poisoning is a medical emergency so the first step is always to call 911.

Some drugs have fentanyl in them which



can cause overdoses. Carry naloxone if you or someone you know uses substances which may contain fentanyl.

Harm Reduction: Usask does not support the use of any drugs. If you use, use as safely as you can.

Becoming Dependent

Dependencies affects people regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, culture, education, or occupation. Problematic substance use may be characterized by the three **C's of Addiction**:

- Loss of **C**ontrol
- **C**ompulsion to use
- Use despite negative **C**onsequences

If you feel like you or someone you know is experiencing substance dependency reach out to a health professional listed at the end of this resource.

People may develop dependencies due to:

- **Personal Struggles** – Addictions can arise from histories of abuse or neglectful parents.
- **Coping mechanism** – Some people struggle to find ways to effectively cope and get caught into addictions as an escape. This can be relationships, family connections and stress.
- **Unhealthy friendships** – Bad friends can result in peer pressure to act on these habits. Many times, it's an escape from loneliness.

Dependency Complications

- **Health** – Dependency on a substance can have health consequences.

Negative health impacts vary depending on the substance.

- **Coma, unconsciousness, or death** - Some drugs taken in high doses or in combination with other substances may be extremely dangerous,
- **Relationship problems or Child neglect/abuse**

Smoking Cessation Products

Vaping products This method works for some.

Nicotine Replacement Theory: gum, lozenge, patches

No prescription needed. Equally effective.

Zyban or Champix: Both prescriptions are covered by Usask Student Health Plan

Herbal Products, Hypnosis, and Acupuncture: Results vary among users.

- **Accidental injuries/death or Suicide** – are higher in individuals with addictions. Certain addictions can significantly increase the risk of suicide
- **Problems with the law.**

Vaping and e-cigarettes

Vaping is the inhalation of vapour containing nicotine, cannabis, or flavourings produced by an e-cigarette. Vape devices convert the e-liquid into vapour.

Vape products may contain Nicotine but will contain harmful chemicals such as acetone or formaldehyde.

Vapourers are not aware of how much

hazardous material and particles is inhaled and going into the lungs. E-cigarettes can deliver much higher doses of nicotine in a shorter amount of time than conventional cigarettes, causing as much damaging lung injury as smoking. Vaping with marijuana has been linked to vaping-related lung injuries.

Smoking Tobacco

Nicotine is addictive. Once inhaled, it is immediately absorbed into the bloodstream - increasing your heart rate and blood pressure - as well as stimulating the nervous system. When quitting or cutting back, the body goes into withdrawal. Withdrawal symptoms include depression, feelings of frustration, impatience, anger, anxiety, and irritability.

Harm Reduction: Smoking or Vaping

- Reduce the nicotine concentration in your e-juice. Eventually work to ween off nicotine completely by

reducing the concentration in e-juice over time.

- Keep your hands and mouth busy! Chew gum, drink lots of water, or play with a pen or fidget toy.
- Avoid vaping triggers. Change your routine to avoid places or things that you associate with vaping.
- Get a good night's sleep and rest.
- Reward yourself after 24 hours of going without.

Alcohol and Cannabis: Low Risk Guidelines

Alcohol

For men: 15 drinks a week, with no more than three drinks a day most days.



For women: 10 drinks a week, with no more than two drinks a day most days.

When zero is the limit:

- When driving a vehicle or using
- Are pregnant or are breastfeeding,
- On medication,
- Do not want to,

- Do not believe you can drink responsibly,
- Living with mental or physical health problems, and
- When you are underage.

Cannabis

Choose cannabis products with higher CBD to THC ratios. If you don't know the ratio of chemicals in what they're using, **start low and go slow**.



- Choose natural products over synthetics
- Reduce exposure to smoke through edibles or vaping
- If you smoke, use smart smoking practices where you don't hold your breath or puff hard
- Limit use to only on weekends or once a week
- Wait at least six hours before driving, you may need more time
- Know when someone is at higher risk of harm
 - Age- the younger someone is when they start using, the higher the risk of harm
 - Family History- there is a correlation between family history of psychosis, cannabis use

- and a person experiencing psychotic episodes
- Pregnancy- cannabis can cause harms to the fetus

Harm Reduction for other substances including Stimulants, MDMD, and Hallucinogens.

- **Understand the legal ramifications of use.**
- Stay hydrated, eat regularly, and take breaks
- Use your own equipment to avoid spreading infections
- Finely grind cocaine to avoid damage to nasal passages if snorting
- If snorting, snort lukewarm water in between bumps to decrease risk of nosebleeds
- Be aware of your health as heart conditions can be worsened by stimulants
- Swallowing MDMA is safer than snorting
- Avoid other drugs (including caffeine) and alcohol to minimize side effects
- Start with smaller doses and wait for effects before re-dosing
- Be prepared for the side effects of MDMA such as dry mouth and jaw clenching/grinding

- Be sure you are in the right frame of mind. Hallucinogens can be a positive experience for those who embrace it but can also be scary for those who try to control the experience.
- Avoid bad experiences by staying clear of climbing things, looking in mirrors, or having sex with anyone other than a comfortable, familiar partner.
- Stay away from driving as your judgement and coordination may be greatly impaired.

Bad Trips and Overdoses: What to do

Always call 911 if you suspect an overdose or need medical help.

Alcohol: vomiting while unconscious, seizures, irregular breathing, low body temperature, confusion

- Stay with the person and lay them on their side.
- Don't give them food, drink or medication
- If their breathing is erratic and they are unconscious call 911 and be prepared to do CPR

Cannabis: paranoia, accelerated heart rate, accelerated breathing, psychosis in rare cases

- Get them to a safe place and sit down
- Help them to relax and prevent anxiety or fear. Remind them the effects are temporary

Stimulants: weakness, shaking, heart rhythm disturbances, nausea, aggression, confusions, seizures

- Call 911 immediately
- Stay with the individual and encourage them to drink water and stay calm. Keep them cool.
- If they are having a seizure, make sure there is nothing around that can hurt them

MDMA- uncontrolled body movement, restlessness and anxiety, clenched jaw, elevated body temperature and excessive sweating, irregular and rapid heart rate

- Lay the person down and turn them on their side
- Remove nearby objects in case they have a seizure
- Keep them calm while waiting for an ambulance
- Be prepared to give CPR if they stop breathing

Hallucinogens- panic, aggression, suicidal or homicidal ideation, severe depression, rapid heart rate, seizures

- Get them to a safe place and play calming music
- Help them surrender to the experience rather than trying to control it
- Help them to try to meditate or relax

Treatment Options

Treatment options for addiction depend on several factors including what type of substance the individual is addicted to and how it affects them. Treatment can include a combination of inpatient and outpatient programs, counselling, self-help groups, pairing with individual sponsors, and medication. **A health care professional can recommend the best treatment options for each individual person suffering from addiction.**

- **Treatment programs** - These usually focus on getting sober and preventing relapse. Individual, group, and/or family sessions may be part of the program. Depending on the level of addiction, patient behaviors, and type of substance

these programs may be in outpatient or residential settings.

- **Counselling** - May be individual and/or family sessions with a specialist. Family involvement can increase the success of treatment. Dealing with relapses, coping with cravings and avoiding the substance are often focuses of therapy.
- **Self-help groups** - These groups help the individual meet other people with the same problem and are also a source of education and information. Examples include Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA).
- **Help with withdrawal symptoms** - The main goal is often to get the addictive substance out of the person's body. The addict may be given gradually reduced dosages (tapering) or in some cases a substitute substance is given. Treatment can be either outpatient or inpatient.

Additional Resources

Community Addictions Services

Anyone can refer individuals to
Community Addictions Services: clients

themselves, family, friends, employers, and other professionals. If you feel you need help, call Adult Mental Health Services Centralized Intake:

306-655-7777.

Smoker's Helpline: 1-877-513-5333

Medicine Shoppe Pharmacy: 306-668-2256

Prairie Harm Reduction

306-242-5005

A safe consumption site. Also provides Nalozone training.

AIDS Saskatoon

Provides safer substance use supplies and education. You can also receive naloxone training from the staff. 306-242-5005

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