



Drug Overdoses

Recreational Drug Use Emergencies

The variety of illicit drugs has increased over the years, which makes it harder for First Aiders to ascertain how to deal with each type.

The following provides you with an overview of how to deal with most presentations. Some drugs can make people very drowsy and later result in unconsciousness, whilst others can lead to people becoming very tense. Others can become panicky or even aggressive, whilst some drugs can produce dangerous levels of dehydration.

So what should you do? Deal with the signs and symptoms you recognise as listed below and when in doubt call for emergency help, eg Ambulance.

RECOGNITION:

If patient is tense & panicky

The usual cause is due to hallucinogenic drugs: Amphetamines, Ecstasy, LSD and Magic Mushrooms as well as high doses of Cannabis, or combinations of these. If someone is really tense and panicky on drugs take the following steps:

If Conscious

- Calm and reassure them quietly, explaining that the panicky feeling will gradually go.
- If possible, remove them from loud noises and bright lights.
- Help them if they over-breathe (hyperventilate), which will often result in them feeling dizzy and nauseated (refer to 'Hyperventilation').
- If they are having a 'Bad Trip', refer below for more information.

WARNING

If they are having a 'bad trip' eg. feeling confused, overwhelmed by crowds and attention, fear they are losing their minds, hallucinating, becoming paranoid, they can also become dangerously violent.

DO NOT endanger yourself. If you have to help someone, remember to stay calm. Anxiety and fear will worsen the situation.

If Unconscious

- Clear the Airway and follow the Basic Life Support Flow Chart (See *Emergency First Aid* p5.)
- Seek urgent medical assistance. i.e. preferably AMBULANCE.

Overheats or Dehydrates

Overheating and dehydration tends to happen with drugs like Amphetamine and Ecstasy as these drugs raise body temperature and it also causes people to over exert themselves in hot places, such as clubs / discos making the symptoms worse.

These types of drugs give the user an energy boost and when used in clubs and discos they often dance for long periods getting even hotter causing them to lose a lot of body fluids eg. ½ litre an hour, which has been the main reason for Ecstasy-related deaths.

RECOGNITION:

- Cramps
- Hot dry skin
- Headaches and dizziness, vomiting
- Sudden fatigue
- Feeling like urinating but inability to do so when you go
- Fainting

Prevention of Dehydration and Overheating:

- Not dancing for long periods
- Taking regular rests and relaxing in a cool area
- Drinking non-alcoholic fluids e.g. at no more than about the rate of half a litre (or one pint) an hour, (sipping the drink regularly) and avoiding alcohol.
- DO NOT drink too much water as this too can cause major problems, and can even be lethal. Just stay within the above recommendations
- Wear cool clothes, but not hats as they help to keep in heat
- Salty snacks, sports drinks and fruit juices can also help to keep the body provided with the minerals it needs.

MANAGEMENT

If Conscious & Overheated

- Move the person to a cool area eg. outside.
- Apply cold water to cool them down eg. using a damp towel.
- Fan them and consider removing unnecessary clothing, ensuring modesty for the patient in public areas.
- Seek urgent medical help eg. Ambulance.

If Unconscious or 'Fitting'

- Clear the airway and follow the Basic Life Support Flow Chart
- Seek urgent medical assistance. i.e. preferably Ambulance.
- Refer to 'Epileptic Seizures' for more information.



'Bad Trips'

Tips for Dealing with 'Bad Trips'

It's advisable to call an Ambulance in such cases, however whilst waiting the following approach can be used as a guideline to deal with the person.

1. **Acceptance:** Try to gain the person's trust and confidence by keeping calm and trying not to force them to do things
2. **Reduce stimuli:** Try to take the person to a quiet place, where they feel safe and comfortable, keep your movements slow and smooth, allowing them to move freely.
3. **Reassure** the person that the drug is causing the effect and that it will go away with time. A positive attitude can often turn a trip around.
4. **Rest:** Make them comfortable and feeling reassured. If the person becomes violent or aggressive - call for help.
5. **Talkdown:** Talk constantly in a soothing tone and if required, remind them who they are, trying to discuss pleasant, peaceful topics. Get them to focus on your face can also assist in grounding them as well as getting them to think simple and happy thoughts, and creating a positive attitude.

SPECIAL NOTE

By using these guidelines bad trips can often be turned around. The 'key' is, when in doubt about a person's condition, seek urgent medical help eg. Ambulance - ring 000.