

## **DRUG INFORMATION:**

**This resource was prepared by youth who use drugs for service providers who aim to increase their capacity to implement harm reduction.**

**This document contains information on the following substances**

- **Cannabis**
- **MDMA**
- **Cocaine**
- **Xanax**

# **COCAINE**

## **What is Cocaine?**

Cocaine is a substance extracted from the leaves of the coca plant, naturally found in the western regions of South America. Cocaine is classified as a stimulant, meaning that it may induce feelings of hyperactivity, euphoria, and increased alertness. Cocaine is also commonly referred to as coke, snow white, blow, yayo, etc.

NOTE: The most common Route of Administration (ROA) for cocaine is snorting. Through snorting, cocaine is absorbed through the mucous membranes that line the nose and sinuses. This resource will focus on snorting as a primary ROA for cocaine use.

## **Legality**

Currently, cocaine is a Schedule I narcotic, meaning that the possession and distribution of cocaine is illegal in all Canadian provinces and territories. If convicted, the possession and/or distribution of cocaine can carry a hefty sentence.

## **Harm Reduction Tips**

### Mixing Cocaine and Other Substances

Combining cocaine with other substances may increase health risks associated with cocaine or introduce others. To learn more about cocaine's interactions with other substances, check out the [TripSit Drug Chart](#), as well as [drugcocktails.ca](#).

### Before Use and What to Bring

- Prior to using cocaine, try to eat a meal. One effect of cocaine is decreased thirst and appetite. Eating before use may make the comedown easier.
- The comedown from heavier use may require a recovery day. Try to plan around this.
- As cocaine may increase the desire for sexual activity, consider carrying condoms, lube, dental dams, and other safer sex supplies.
- Pack a naloxone kit. While a cocaine overdose cannot be reversed by naloxone, fentanyl (an opioid) has been found in Toronto's cocaine supply.
- Ensure that safer snorting supplies is on hand (e.g. new and sterile straws). Insert the straw high into the nasal cavity before snorting - when cocaine is left in the nostril, it may lead to irritation and a damaged septum.
- Some people may pick their skin, grind teeth, or chew lips during the high. Carrying stress toys, chewing gum, or candies may help redirect these desires.
- Get vaccinated for Hepatitis A and B.

## During

- Ensure that cocaine is used in a safe environment with people you trust.
- Due to the expense of cocaine, it is often cut with other substances. Remember to begin with a smaller test dose, wait for the effects to kick in, and continue to pace your use throughout the night.
- Chop and snort cocaine off of a sterile surface.
  - Chop up cocaine into a fine powder as larger pieces may be harmful to the nasal cavity.
- Do not share straws or snorting supplies, when using with others, use different coloured straws or add stickers to avoid accidental sharing. Additionally, do not use rolled bills to snort, as these practices may lead to the spread of Hepatitis C.
- Alternate nostrils during use.

## After

- Following use, rinse out nostrils using water or saline solution. This will help to prevent nasal damage.
- Applying Vitamin E to the nasal cavity following use can aid in the healing process.
- Try to sleep and stay hydrated.
- Coming down from the high may be uncomfortable; know that the most intense parts of the comedown last for 45 minutes to an hour. During this time, employing coping strategies and other relaxation techniques may be helpful. Eating and keeping hydrated may also ease some of the discomfort.

## **Stimulant Overdose**

### Increased Risk Factors

- Lower tolerance of cocaine
- Sleep deprivation
- Food deprivation and dehydration
- Using other substance with cocaine

### Signs of an Overdose

- Nausea or throwing up
- Blacking out
- Increased body temperature or sweating
- Seizures
- Muscle cramps or stiffness
- Symptoms of heart attack include tight chest, racing heart, shortness of breath or irregular breathing

## Overdose Response

1. Seek medical attention immediately and provide medical professionals with as much information as possible.
2. If there is no pulse, begin CPR and chest compressions.
3. Keep calm and stay with them.
4. Provide water, but avoid over hydration.
5. Place cool, damp cloths under armpits, back of neck, and forehead.
6. Encourage the person to not take any more substances.

## Mental Health Considerations

Due to the intense and often pleasurable feelings that may come with cocaine use (euphoria, confidence, invincibility) its use can be highly desirable to those with mental health concerns. However, the post-use crash can get intense, and may be more difficult for those with mental health concerns. As always, self-care is incredibly important and should be scheduled into the comedown.

## Resources:

<https://harmreduction.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/CisforCocaine.pdf>

<https://harmreductionto.ca/cocaine-crack>

# Cannabis

## What is Cannabis?

Cannabis, also known as weed, pot, marijuana, etc., is a substance derived from the Cannabis plant, and grown all around the world. Depending on the strain, dose, potency, or route of administration, cannabis can take on traits of a stimulant, depressant, and/or hallucinogen. Due to this range of effects, it is most often referred to as its own class of drug - a cannabinoid. Some possibilities effects of cannabis use include: relaxation, joy, emotional and physical pain relief, increased appetite, lack of motivation.

## Harm Reduction Tips

### Mixing Cannabis and Other Substances

While cannabis is often mixed with other substances, it is important to remember that cannabis is a drug and will impact (and often amplify) the effects of others. If mixing cannabis and other substances, it is not recommended to use the same dose you would of either substance individually when mixing. If first time using, it is not recommended to mix.

### Before and What to Bring

- If smoking:
  - Pack screens and filters.
  - Clean your glass pieces regularly.
  - Avoid smoking out of plastic and metals (e.g. water bottle bong, pop cans, etc.).
  - Bring lip balm in the case of dry, cracking lips.
  - Bring water and/or other preferred liquids.
- If ingesting (e.g. edibles):
  - Eat a non-dosed meal before taking any edibles.
  - Be mindful of dosing - it's incredibly difficult to accurately predict the exact amounts of a substance in edibles, especially if they have been cooked/baked into a food.
  - If the edibles are especially delicious (e.g. baked goods), try to bring non-dosed versions as well in case of the munchies.

### During

- If smoking:
  - Avoid taking "deep" drags and holding your breath. While it may be tempting to hold your breath (with the goal of getting higher), THC is absorbed within the first few seconds and holding your breath may cause more irritation than necessary.
  - Drink water! Cannabis may cause dry mouth, and smoking is harsh on the throat, drinking water can help soothe this as well as avoid any potential light-headedness.
  - If using a dab rig (a form of glass smoking apparatus), remember that they get extremely hot - handle with care.
- If ingesting:

- Try to be patient. Because ingestion is one of the slowest onset, yet longest lasting routes of administration, you may be wondering when the high will kick in. Remember that while it may take a while to enter your system, if you re-dose, the high may be much more intense than anticipated.

After

- If ingesting:
  - As edibles have a much longer duration, you may need to schedule in more “downtime” during and after use.

### **Mental Health Considerations**

- While cannabis can help some folks with anxiety, it could also increase anxiety, paranoia, racing thoughts.
- Because there are so many different strains and still a lack of consistency amongst regulated strains, may be hard for individuals to choose strains that support their mental wellness.
- If you have a family history of schizophrenia, you may be susceptible to triggering onset symptoms if you use cannabis.

### **Resources:**

<https://www.leafly.ca/news/health/marijuana-mental-health-harm-reduction-strategies>

<https://www.drugsand.me/en/>

**MDMA**

## What is MDMA?

MDMA, an acronym for 3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine, is a popular party drug that comes in crystal or rock-like forms. MDMA is often sold as a pressed pill (Ecstasy) or a crushed power, often in a capsule (Molly). MDMA is an empathogen with some properties of a stimulant, meaning that it may induce feelings of euphoria, openness, and connectedness to those around them.

When discussing MDMA, it is important to make a distinction between its 3 main forms.

1. MDMA
  - a. When we use the term MDMA, we are referring to the pure form of the substance which is often found in crystal or rock-like forms.
2. Molly
  - a. Molly is the powdered form of MDMA crystal and is usually sold in clear capsules. It's important to note that these pills may be cut with other substances (most often an amphetamine) and won't always be pure MDMA.
3. Ecstasy
  - a. Ecstasy is the pressed pill form of MDMA, usually colourful and with a logo or image stamped on them. Ecstasy is always cut with other substances (such as amphetamines, 2CB etc.) to increase the effects, duration, or intensity of the high.

## Legality

In Canada, MDMA is a Schedule I narcotic, meaning that the possession and distribution of MDMA is illegal in all Canadian provinces and territories. If convicted, possession and/or distribution of MDMA may result in imprisonment.

## Harm Reduction Tips

### Mixing MDMA and Other Substances

Mixing MDMA and other substances (prescription and otherwise) may increase risks associated with MDMA use and introduce others. MDMA is known to increase the risk for serotonin syndrome in those taking other substances that change the body's response to serotonin (e.g. antidepressants).

NOTE: for further information on mixing, check out the [TripSit Drug Chart](#) and [drugcocktails.ca](#).

## Before Use and What to Bring

- Test the MDMA! Using drug testing kits helps to ensure that your MDMA only has the substances you're expecting.
  - NOTE: while drug testing is a definite harm reduction tip, it doesn't always tell the full story. To stay safe, always start with a low dose, give it time, and see how it feels.
- Be conscious of current emotional state/mindset prior to use. MDMA is known to bring out any concerns that one may be struggling with and it's important that these feelings are able to be dealt with during and following use.
- Plan around the comedown. The day after MDMA usage may need to be blocked off as a "recovery day".
- Avoid using MDMA in sessions too close together (ideally 3 months apart). Because MDMA may deplete the body's serotonin levels.
- Try to eat a meal about 4 hours before use. This gives the body time to digest while also keeping food in your system.
  - While MDMA itself may not cause a lack of appetite, most forms of MDMA are cut with a stimulant to enhance its effects. This may cause a lack of appetite or feeling of "going all night". Eating a meal before use may lessen the effects of the comedown.
- Prepare an easily ingested breakfast or snack for the next morning. As you may feel tired or unwilling to make food (while still being hungry) having something ready to eat/drink (e.g. throwing a smoothie in the fridge, having oatmeal ready) is an easy way to make the comedown a little better.
- As teeth grinding is a commonly reported side effect of MDMA use, bringing gum, candies or something to keep your mouth occupied may be helpful.
- As MDMA may increase the desire for "closeness" and sexual desire, If you're using in public or in a group setting, talking with friends about boundaries and what you are/aren't willing to do can be a great help in having the night you want.

#### During

- Stay hydrated! Try to drink one cup of water or electrolyte-containing drink (e.g. Gatorade) for every hour of use. This can help to reduce the risk for heatstroke, especially when dancing all night.
  - NOTE: it is important not to over hydrate as this may lead to a crash in electrolyte levels which can be dangerous. Overhydration happens when a loss of electrolytes (usually through sweat) is only being replaced through water, a substance lacking in electrolytes.
- Take breaks! While MDMA may induce a feeling of being able to "go all night", your body can't sustain this for very long. Especially if dancing under hot lights with plenty of people.

#### After

- Hydrate! Hydrate! Hydrate!

- Get lots of sleep. Sleep helps the body recover from strenuous activity.
- Some folks find using 5HTP (a supplement that may help boost serotonin levels) 24 hours after MDMA use helpful in reducing the discomfort of the comedown.

### **Mental Health Considerations**

Due to the way MDMA works in the body (increase, then sharp decline of serotonin levels), it may cause an intense post-use crash in individuals with low serotonin levels (usually folks with depression). While this may not deter folks from using MDMA, if you struggle with low serotonin levels, it is important to be extra diligent towards self-care in the days following MDMA use.

Additionally, while MDMA is known to induce euphoria, it can also amplify any difficult emotions that are still being processed.

### **Resources:**

<https://rollsafe.org/>

<https://tripsafe.org/>

<https://tripsit.me/>

## **XANAX**

### **What is Xanax?**

Xanax, the trade name for Alprazolam, is a short-acting benzodiazepine often prescribed as an anti-anxiety medication. It works similarly to alcohol - by enhancing the effects of GABA

(*gamma*-Aminobutyric acid), a neuro-transmitter. Xanax is classified as a depressant or "downer", meaning that it may induce feelings of a calm euphoria, relaxation, drowsiness, and/or increased comfort.

### **Legality**

In Canada, Xanax is illegal to possess without prescription and is always illegal distribute. If caught with Xanax that is not prescribed, considerable charges may apply.

### **Harm Reduction Tips**

#### Mixing Xanax and Other Substances

As a benzodiazepine, mixing Xanax with other substances, especially other downers, may be dangerous. Many downers are also Central Nervous System Depressants, meaning that they may cause slow, shallow breathing, and lowered heart rate. Avoid using Xanax with other downers such as; alcohol, GHB, opioids (e.g. heroin, oxycodone, codeine, morphine), and other forms of benzodiazepines.

To learn more about mixing Xanax and other substances, check out the [TripSit Drug Chart](#) and [www.drugcocktails.ca](http://www.drugcocktails.ca)

#### Before

- Test the Xanax! While Xanax is a prescription drug, it is not always bought from, or supplied by, a source with a prescription. In order to increase profit and enhance the effects, Xanax may be cut with other substances (usually an opiate).
  - NOTE: while drug testing is a definite harm reduction tip, it doesn't always tell the full story. To stay safe, always start with a low dose, give it time, and see how it feels.
- Use in a safe, comfortable environment with people you trust. Because Xanax may cause drowsiness, it is important that you feel comfortable in your surroundings in case you feel the need to doze off.
- Eat 1 - 2 hours before dosing, as Xanax can cause nausea.

#### During

- Start low and go slow!
  - Xanax has a wide range of typical onset times (15-40 minutes!) so try to be patient when waiting for effects.
  - If still not experiencing the desired effects, up the dosage slowly and by a small amount each time.

- Use with a buddy. Having another individual present to monitor signs of overdose is indispensable.
- Carry naloxone. While Xanax is not an opiate, fentanyl has been found in Toronto's Xanax supply.

### **Depressant Overdose**

#### Increased Risk Factors

- Lower tolerance of benzodiazepines
- Using other downers with Xanax

#### Signs of an Overdose

- Confusion
- Lack of coordination
- Severe drowsiness and inability to stay awake
- Loss of consciousness
- Difficulty breathing
- Slow, shallow breaths
- Unresponsiveness
- Blue-tinged lips and/or fingers

#### Overdose Response

1. If opiates were used, administer naloxone.
  - a. NOTE: even if you're unsure of the presence of opiates, use of naloxone will not cause harm.
2. Seek medical attention immediately and provide medical professionals with as much information as possible.
3. If there is no pulse, begin CPR and chest compressions.
4. Stay with the person and monitor them until the ambulance arrives.

### **Mental Health Considerations**

- While the calming, pain-relief, and muscle relaxant effects of Xanax may be desirable, they may also mimic symptoms of difficult mental health experiences (e.g. drowsiness, mental fog, lack of motivation).
- As Xanax may complicate an individual's perception of time, periods of memory loss may cause distress.

- Effects of Xanax may be more subtle in comparison to other substances, it can be easy to underestimate - be sure to treat Xanax with the same caution afforded to any other substance.

**Resources:**

<http://www.drugcocktails.ca/>

<https://www.drugsand.me/en/>