

How to Smoke Drugs Safer

What is smoking?

Smoking a drug is one of the fastest ways for drugs to reach the brain. When a drug is smoked, it enters the bloodstream through the lungs and quickly travels to the brain. Some commonly smoked drugs include cannabis (marijuana, hashish) heroin, powder and crack cocaine, amphetamine and methamphetamine, ketamine, and opium.

What are the risks of smoking?

Smoking drugs is safer than injecting drugs in many cases. However, there are some risks to know.

- ✓ Smoking drugs can cause open sores, burns, and cuts on the lips and inside the mouth. Blood from an open wound can transfer blood to a pipe. If the pipe is shared, small amounts of blood (might not be visible) can lead to spread infections like human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).
- ✓ Pipes made of plastic, pop cans, or copper can release toxic fumes when heated or burned. Thin, glass pipes, such as light bulbs or syringes, break easily and can cause cuts.
- ✓ Metal pushers (e.g., coat hanger, screwdriver) can chip or cause cracks in the pipe leading to oral sores. Plastic pushers (e.g., pen, syringe) can melt inside the pipe.
- ✓ Inhaling smoke can worsen lung function and cause respiratory problems, such as shortness of breath, chronic cough, chest pain, asthma, narrowing and inflammation of airways, and lung infections. Some drugs contain toxic materials and can worsen these effects.
- ✓ Smoking stimulants like methamphetamine reduces saliva production and increases acidity in the mouth. This allows more bacteria to grow, plaque to form, and can cause gum disease and tooth decay.
- ✓ Crack cocaine requires very high temperatures to be smoked. This can cause hoarseness, difficulty swallowing, airway burns and bleeding, swelling damage to the heart, heart attack, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, and stroke.
- ✓ Inhaling heroin can cause white brain matter disease (leukoencephalopathy).
- ✓ “Fry,” or marijuana cigarettes contain embalming fluid (containing methanol, ethanol and formaldehyde) and PCP (phencyclidine). Smoking these substances can cause bronchitis, body tissue damage, brain damage, lung damage, impaired coordination, and swelling and sores in the throat, nose, and esophagus.

Planning for safer smoking:

- ✓ Select a safe and relaxed space
- ✓ Always use with a friend or around other people. If you are alone, call the Never Use Alone hotline at (800) 484-3731 or visit <https://neverusealone.com/>. An operator will stay on the line while you use. If you drop out, they’ll call 911, reporting an “unresponsive person” at your location.
- ✓ Have a naloxone (Narcan) kit on hand to reverse an opioid overdose.
- ✓ Test your drugs for fentanyl, a powerful opioid that increases risk for overdose.

How to smoke safer:

- ✓ Clean your hands with soap and water. Clean your equipment with soap and water or alcohol swabs. Rinse your pipe out with alcohol to remove remaining residue.
- ✓ Drink water or sugar-free beverages to stay hydrated and keep your mouth moist.
- ✓ Plan to use your own lighter. Lighters for every individual can apply consistent heat to his or her own pipe and to reduce the chance of sharing a pipe with someone else.
- ✓ Avoid sharing pipes. Use Pyrex glass pipes, which conduct less heat and have reduced risk for breaking and causing burns. If you prefer to use a metal pipes, those made of pure brass or titanium are the safest.
- ✓ Start with a small amount first. If it's safe, you can always put more in your body but once it's here, it's very hard to get it out
- ✓ Use clean wooden push sticks (e.g., chopsticks, kebab sticks).
- ✓ Hold the flame beside the pipe stem but not directly on it. This produces enough heat to melt the rock but reduces how hot the stem gets. Moving the flame alongside the stem instead of concentrating the flame in one spot will also spread the heat out and prevent burns.
- ✓ Use a rubber or plastic mouthpiece at the mouth end of the pipe to prevent burns.

Caring for yourself after smoking:

- ✓ Use lip balm or Vaseline to protect and heal chapped or injured lips.
- ✓ Use sugar-free chewing gum to stimulant saliva production.
- ✓ Drink water to reduce cracks, blisters, and risk of infection by keeping your mouth hydrated.

Where can I access clean supplies for smoking?

- ✓ Free Chapstick, sugar-free gum, safer sex supplies, hygiene and wound care supplies, naloxone (Narcan), and fentanyl test kits are available at the VA. **Contact Dr. Tessa Rife at 415-319-1193 if you need supplies.**



- ✓ Syringes, syringe disposal containers, condoms, and some wound care supplies are also available as a prescription at the VA. Ask your medical provider if you need supplies.
- ✓ Check the CITYWIDE NALOXONE/NARCAN & HARM REDUCTION SUPPLY SCHEDULE for additional resources available in the community.