

# illicit drug use & diabetes

**It is known that illicit drugs can significantly damage our health and can cause death. Their use is therefore not recommended for anyone, whether or not they have diabetes. However for people with diabetes, the use of illicit drugs can also result in poorer blood glucose control with potentially serious consequences.**

In today's society it is unrealistic to expect that people will automatically choose to lead a healthy lifestyle. This information sheet is intended to help you to achieve the best possible control of your blood glucose levels if you are using illicit drugs.

## Important things to remember when using illicit drugs

- Be as well informed as possible and consider the potential impact on your health.
- Choose as safe an environment as possible.
- Never experiment for the first time without someone else being present.
- Carry something with you explaining that you have diabetes in case of emergency.
- Make sure at least some of the people with you are aware you have diabetes, know what to do in an emergency and will be capable of providing any required assistance.

## What are illicit drugs?

Commonly used illicit drugs are referred to as being either an 'upper' or a 'hallucinogen'. In this brochure we also discuss the use of opiates.

<b>Uppers</b>	<b>Opiates</b>	<b>Hallucinogens</b>
Ecstasy / E / MDMA	Heroin	Cannabis / marijuana / pot / weed / yarndi
Ice / crystal meth	Morphine	Magic mushrooms
Cocaine / coke / snow	Smack	LSD / acid / trip / tabs
Speed / whiz / goey	Powder	Solvents / petrol / paint / glue
	H	
	Joy powder	
	Codeine	

**Illicit drugs cause altered perception in those who use them. In people with diabetes, altered perception can result in a general inability to follow their normal diabetes routine, increasing their risk of severe hypoglycaemia, hyperglycaemia and diabetic ketoacidosis.**



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## What effects do uppers have on the body?

While uppers last for anywhere from 4 to 24 hours depending on what is taken, they generally last from 4 to 6 hours. It is recommended that they are not mixed with other drugs or alcohol, primarily due to having many effects on the body and blood glucose levels at one time.

### When using uppers, you may experience:

Increased energy	Wakefulness
Mild hallucinations	Increased self confidence
Numbness	Increased sensation
Weakness	Lethargy
Increased heart rate	Increased metabolism
Poor coordination	Nausea / vomiting
Decreased appetite	Twitching / itching
Disrupted sleep	Memory problems
Panic attacks	Depression
Addiction	Overdose
Hydration problems	Increased risk of cardiac problems
Paranoia	Increased body temperature
Weight loss	Increased sexual behaviour
Aggression	'Come down' *
Dilated pupils	Sores

Long term use can trigger mental health problems.

\* It is possible to sleep for days as a result of a 'come down'.

## How uppers can affect diabetes control

- Increased risk of missing insulin injections due to altered perception or sleeping for a long period of time as a result of a 'come down'.
- Increased risk of diabetic ketoacidosis as a result of missed insulin injections.
- Hypoglycaemia from inadequate food intake as a result of increased metabolism and decreased appetite.
- Reduced ability to recognise a hypo and to manage diabetes and blood glucose levels due to altered perception.

## What effects do hallucinogens have on the body?

People need to be aware that the experience can be very pleasant OR very unpleasant and there is no way of knowing this before using it.

### When using hallucinogens you may experience:

Euphoria	Hallucinations
Altered perception	Decreased inhibitions
Depression	Increased sensitivity
Disorientation	Impaired judgement
Lack of coordination	Sleepiness
Mental disorders	Loss of motivation
Confusion	Paranoia
Increased metabolism	Increased appetite

'Whitey' / nausea (usually caused by drinking alcohol at the same time).

### How hallucinogens can affect diabetes control

- Hyperglycaemia as a result of:
  - eating large amounts of food due to increased appetite.
  - forgetting to take insulin due to altered perception.
- Increased risk of diabetic ketoacidosis as a result of hyperglycaemia.
- Disruption to normal diabetes routine due to tiredness.
- Hypoglycaemia if taking large amounts of marijuana which may lower blood glucose levels.

### What effects do opiates have on the body?

Opiates are highly addictive. As purities are unpredictable, the effects on the body are variable and there is no way of knowing the effects before using them. They usually last for 4 to 24 hours.

### When using opiates you may experience:

Relaxation	Lowered inhibitions
Euphoria	Hallucinations
Altered perception	Decreased inhibitions
Nausea	Vomiting
Constricted pupils	Drowsiness
Slurred speech	Relief of pain
Rush of well-being	Absence of tension
Relief of anxiety	Chronic constipation
Lowered sexual drive	Impotence in men
Itching / scratching	Decreased appetite
Confusion	Withdrawal
Psychological addiction	Social / financial problems
Physical addiction	Overdose resulting in coma / death

## How opiates can affect diabetes control

- Altered concentration and coordination may slow down a person's ability to recognise hypoglycaemia or hyperglycaemia.
- Increased risk of severe hypoglycaemia or hyperglycaemia.
- Altered eating habits may affect blood glucose levels and ability to manage diabetes.
- Hyperglycaemia due to forgetting to take insulin as a result of altered perception.
- Increased risk of diabetic ketoacidosis due to missing insulin injections.

## What precautions can someone with diabetes take when using illicit drugs?

- Reduce the risk of ketoacidosis by making sure you:
  - do not miss your insulin injections.
  - stay hydrated at all times. Illicit drugs usually increase body temperature whether through the actions of the drug itself or through increased physical activity (eg: dancing).
- Keep initial drug doses small so that you can better assess the effect of the drug on your mind, your body and your diabetes management.
- Understand that if using a drug more than once, its effects on your body and blood glucose levels can vary due to the differences in the purities of the drug.

## How to help keep your diabetes under control

**If you are using or considering experimenting with illicit drugs, here are some important points to help you keep your diabetes under control and stay safe:**

### Uppers

- Speak with your diabetes educator and other professionals with expertise in this area eg: Turning Point (see page 6).
- Always take your insulin.
- Be aware that the effects of the drugs may alter your ability to recognise hypoglycaemia.
- It is recommended they are not mixed with other drugs or alcohol, primarily due to having many effects on the body and blood glucose levels at one time.
- Prior to taking 'uppers' it is recommended that you have a meal which is rich in carbohydrates and preferably low GI (eg: wholegrain bread, milk, yoghurt) to reduce the risk of hypoglycaemia.

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- Always carry fast acting (quickly absorbed) glucose such as jellybeans or glucose tablets.
- Test your blood glucose levels regularly to avoid hypoglycaemia or hyperglycaemia.
- While taking 'uppers' it is advisable that you are with people who are aware that you have diabetes and who know what to do if you show signs of a hypo. If they don't already know, tell them what to watch out for.
- While tripping / tweaking, it is recommended that you drink carbohydrate containing non-alcoholic fluids to reduce the risk of hypos, particularly if using more energy than usual such as dancing.
- Test your blood glucose level before going to sleep.

## Hallucinogens

- Speak with your diabetes educator and other professionals with expertise in this area eg: Turning Point (see page 6).
- Be aware that the effects of the drugs may alter your ability to recognise hypoglycaemia.
- Always carry fast acting (quickly absorbed) glucose such as jellybeans or glucose tablets.
- Try not to be tempted by unhealthy or overly-sweet foods if experiencing the 'munchies'.
- Stick to your normal diabetes routine as much as possible.
- Test blood glucose levels regularly to determine the effect of the drug on your body.
- Be aware that different types of hallucinogens will have different effects on your blood glucose levels.

## Opiates

- Speak with your diabetes educator and other professionals with expertise in this area eg: Turning Point (see page 6).
- Always take your insulin.
- Be aware that the effects of the drugs may alter your ability to recognise hypoglycaemia or hyperglycaemia.
- Always carry fast acting (quickly absorbed) glucose such as jellybeans or glucose tablets.
- Test blood glucose levels regularly to determine the effect of the drug on your body.
- Try to remember to maintain regular eating habits, even if you don't feel like it.
- While using opiates it is advisable that you are with people who are aware that you have diabetes and who know what to do if you show signs of a hypo. If they don't already know, tell them what to watch out for.

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## Safe sharps disposal

All sharps including used syringes, pen needles and lancets must be disposed of in an Australian Safety Standards-approved sharps container which is puncture-proof and has a secure lid. These are available through pharmacies and your State or Territory Diabetes Organisation. Procedures to dispose of sharps containers vary from State to State. Contact your State or Territory Diabetes Organisation on 1300 136 588, your State Department of Health or Local Council for information.

## Alcohol and drug information

(24 hour / 7 day a week support in each State / Territory)

### Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

**ACT** > 02 6205 4545      **NSW** > 1800 422 599  
**NT** > 1800 131 350      **QLD** > 1800 177 833  
**SA** > 1300 131 340      **TAS** > 1800 811 994  
**WA** > 1800 198 024

**VIC** > **Turning Point** 1800 888 236 ([www.turningpoint.org.au](http://www.turningpoint.org.au))

## To find other support services

[www.med.unsw.edu.au/NDARCWeb.nsf/page/Drug%20Information](http://www.med.unsw.edu.au/NDARCWeb.nsf/page/Drug%20Information)

## Information for teens and young adults

[www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au) (for young adults)

[www.diabeteskidsandteens.com.au](http://www.diabeteskidsandteens.com.au)

[www.realitycheck.org.au](http://www.realitycheck.org.au)

## General information

[www.ancd.org.au](http://www.ancd.org.au) (Australian National Council on Drugs)

[www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/ndarc.nsf](http://www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/ndarc.nsf)

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The design, content and production of this diabetes information sheet has been undertaken by the eight State and Territory member organisations of Diabetes Australia Ltd listed below:

- > Diabetes Australia - NSW
- > Diabetes Australia - Queensland
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- > Healthy Living NT

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