

3. CONDITIONS FAVOURABLE TO SEXUAL HEALTH

Conditions favourable to sexual health *These strategies do not have a direct impact on HIV transmission, but include different practices and contexts that promote good sexual health and contribute to putting other strategies in place.*



CHANGING HOW YOU DRINK OR USE DRUGS

Changing the way you use drugs and alcohol before or during sex in order to have more control over the prevention strategies you put in place

Description

- Alcohol and drugs can be used in a sexual context to^{1,2}
 - lower inhibitions and shyness,
 - increase sensations and sexual pleasure.
- Drinking and drug use can lead to problems because of³⁻⁵
 - the effect of drugs on the body (dehydration, fatigue, side effects),
 - undesirable psychological effects (bad trips), depression, anxiety, mood swings after drug use,
 - increased possibility that you will take sexual risks (intentionally or not)
 - difficulties enjoying sex unless you are drinking or using drugs
 - problems with addiction that some people encounter and that come with a range of negative consequences.
- A range of strategies can be used if you want to continue to drink or use drugs but also reduce the risk to your health, including:^{6,7}
 - Taking smaller amounts before or during sex.
 - Avoiding drinking or drug use when having sex with new partners or with partners you don't know very well.
 - Agreeing on the prevention strategies you will be using before you start drinking or taking drugs.
 - Ensuring you have the necessary supplies (e.g. condoms) and information (e.g. your partner's HIV status) to protect yourself before you drink or use drugs.
 - Avoiding sex when you've had too much to drink or have taken too many drugs.
 - Sticking with the substances you are already familiar with and avoiding new combinations.
 - Taking small amounts at the beginning if you are using something new or taking a medication and you're not sure about the possible interactions.
 - Choosing a method less risky than injection to take drugs
 - Making sure you have enough sterile supplies (e.g. pipes, straws, syringes, injection material) and not sharing any of the supplies you use.
 - Consuming in safe places and with people you trust.
 - Letting the people you are with know about any medication that you take or other substances you have taken.
 - Giving yourself rules for drinking or using drugs and sticking to them, for example, drinking only on the weekend.
 - Drinking lots of water before, during and after periods of drinking or drug use and having food and water on hand (e.g. protein bars) when you drink or use drugs for long periods.
 - Planning periods of rest after you drink or use drugs.
 - If you take medication, making sure you don't miss any doses.
 - Seeing an addiction support service to assess your drinking or drug use.

Effectiveness

- Reducing or slowing down how much you drink or use drugs before sex gives you more control to follow through on prevention strategies. Drinking and drug use have been associated with taking sexual risks.

Acceptability

- In the *Mobilise!* survey among men who have sex with men in Montreal, 85% of respondents knew about changing the way you drink or use drugs as a risk reduction strategy.¹¹
- In many gay social spaces, drinking and drug use is openly tolerated, but so are strategies related to drinking or drug use that can be used to reduce the risks to your health.⁵
- Some groups, however, have negative views about injection drug use, and this can create a sense of isolation for people who use drugs in this way.
- In Montreal, free supplies of safer drug use equipment as well as information about different substances and safer ways to take drugs can be found at community organizations, pharmacies, clinics, etc.
- Advantages of safer drinking and drug use:
 - Offers an option to individuals who do not want to stop drinking or using drugs to continue consuming while reducing the risks to their health.¹²
 - Makes it possible to be more in control and follow through on the prevention strategies you are planning to use.¹²
- Disadvantages of safer drinking and drug use:
 - May be frustrating to slow down or reduce your drinking or drug use when you want to keep going.
 - May be difficult to stick with this strategy in some social contexts, celebrations etc.¹²
 - You do not have control over your partner's drinking or drug use.
 - Does not directly protect against HIV and other STIs.

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