

Student Wellness Services

Harm Reduction Tips



Harm reduction focuses on treating substance use as a public health issue requiring treatment, rather than criminalizing users.

Binge drinking and drug use can lead to harmful consequences, including impairment of coordination, memory, and movement. The brain is still developing well into the twenties, and substance use can cause significant brain damage and other harmful health risks. The [Spectrum of Substance Use](#) can be helpful to understand where you view your substance use. This was developed by Alberta Health Services, and there may be international variations.

If you do decide to drink or use substances, use some of these guidelines to keep yourself safe. These guidelines are based on Canadian research and may be different than in your home country.

Harm reduction strategies can be thought of as 'not too much, not too often, and only in safe situations.'

Not too much

- Take it slow, plan ahead how much you will drink or use by having a set amount of money to use
- Know your product and your supplier. Purchase from government-licensed stores, when possible.
- Alternate alcohol with non-alcoholic drinks, or dilute your drinks with water or juice
- Use caution eating or drinking products (edibles) containing 2.5 mg to 10 mg of THC. It can take up to 4 hours to feel full effects. Having more within this time can increase risk of adverse effects.

Not too often

- Use occasionally rather than frequently, and especially avoid daily use.
- If you feel pressure to drink, choose drinks with less alcohol per volume. Drinking beer instead of wine, or wine instead of hard liquor, can help you to pace yourself more easily
- Check out the [Low Risk Guidelines](#) made available at the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse, to get a better idea of your risk level and assess your drinking

Only in safe situations

- Ask a friend to monitor how much you drink or use.
- Avoid combining any substances (e.g. alcohol and cannabis) because it increases the risk of impairment
- Don't leave your drinks unattended, or have a trusted friend keep an eye on them
- Know the laws before you possess or consume (e.g. cannabis is legal in Canada, but illegal in other countries)
- Make a plan to get home safely and encourage your friends to do the same. Taxi, Uber, public transit, a designated driver are all options to make sure you have safe ride home
- Use clean and sterile equipment, and don't share gear. To reduce risk of contracting viruses such as covid-19, do not share drinks.
- Know the signs of an [overdose](#)



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

For more information

Harm Reduction International is a global NGO that promotes the rights of people who use drugs and their communities through research and advocacy. Check out <https://www.hri.global/>

Do you have any tips or suggestions that you have found to be helpful when using substances? If so, send them to yasmeen.nosshi@ucalgary.ca

For some more information on safer substance use, visit <https://live-ucalgary.ucalgary.ca/safer-substance-use/student-support>

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use, you can contact the UCalgary Harm Reduction Support Advisor at yasmeen.nosshi@ucalgary.ca, or contact the Alberta Health Services Addiction Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.

References

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (n.d.) from <https://www.ccsa.ca/>

Global State of Harm Reduction 2016. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.hri.global/contents/1739>

Health Canada (2019, June 14). Government of Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/healthcanada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/resources/lower-your-risks.html>

Post-Secondary Partnership: Alcohol Harms. (n.d.) Heavy Episodic Drinking Report. Retrieved from <https://pepah.ca/heavy-episodic-drinking-report/>