

Alternatives to Injecting

There may come a time when you can't access veins anymore, but are unable to stop using drugs altogether. If this happens, the following alternatives to injecting might be useful for you.

Smoking or 'Chasing'

The smoking of commonly injected drugs clearly offers lower risks than injecting, both in terms of BBV transmission and risk of overdose. However smoking can cause other harms such as throat and lung problems as well as cracked and bleeding gums and lips.

When compared with injecting, though, smoking your drugs poses:

- Very low risk of viral transmission;
- A lower risk of overdose;
- Fewer health risks;
- An alternative for those who are finding veins difficult to locate; and
- An alternative route of administration whilst injecting sites are given time to heal.

Smoking Heroin

Smoking heroin - 'chasing the dragon' - gives your veins a break and it's safer because there's no way of exchanging blood. While pink and brown rocks or brown powder are best for smoking, any kind of heroin can be used this way, although white powder, because it doesn't burn as well as the others, may lose some of its potency. It takes about 5 minutes for the effects to come on. This is the procedure:

- Use a small piece of foil, about 8 centimetres square, which makes it easier to hold.
- Roll up a bank note or a piece of card into a tube.
- Smear a bit of cooking oil on the foil to prevent the gear from burning too quickly. Then put a small amount of heroin on the foil.
- Hold the foil in one hand, and with the tube in your mouth, light the underside of the foil. As the smoke appears, inhale it sharply through the tube. You have to be quick to make sure the smoke doesn't rise and escape before you are ready.
- You should wait at least five minutes before smoking more.

Smoking Crystal Meth - 'Ice'

Smoking crystal means breathing in toxic chemicals that can damage the lungs and cause respiratory problems. Be aware that smoking ice, especially with dry lips and mouth, can lead to small cuts, and some users have reported that the ice smoke has caused small abrasions on the gums and in the throat. If these bleed and you're sharing a pipe, there's the possibility of transmitting hep C or other BBVs like HIV or Hep B. Over time, gargling salt water will help heal any abrasions.

The best way to smoke crystal is to use a glass pipe. A gas (jet) lighter will make more heat than a regular lighter, which will melt the crystal faster and mean less goes to waste. Gas lighters don't leave black marks around the pipe, so you also get a better idea of what's happening in the pipe. Make sure the crystal is melted before inhaling slowly. Let the pipe cool down once in a while. With continuous use, pipes can get very hot and burn the skin. They can also get brittle and break.

Snorting

As with smoking, snorting (or sniffing) drugs is usually safer than injecting as the risk of BBV transmission is lower. Transmission can occur, though, if straws, etc, are used by more than one person. Prolonged, frequent snorting of drugs (especially cocaine) can lead to damage to the mucous membranes in the nose and can also cause, or exacerbate, sinus problems.

Make sure the drug you are going to snort is well chopped up (powdered): rough crystals can tear the nasal lining, which means risking the presence of blood. You can use a cleaned razor blade or a cleaned knife to get rid of lumps and then to make a line on a clean surface. Clean the blade of the knife or razor blade with a new swab, wiping in one direction only. Insert a straw or a rolled up bank note (or card) into one of your nasal cavities and then inhale the line in one go. Be careful not to exhale before you've snorted the whole line, if you have damaged mucous membranes in the nose you risk transmitting hep C and other BBV's, as well as wasting the drugs you have just snorted. After you've snorted wait at least 10 minutes to see how strong the effect is before deciding whether to use more.

Swallowing

Of the most commonly injected drugs, swallowing is most effective for amphetamines, which are often taken in this way, either by mixing the drug in a drink, or by 'bombing' (wrapping it in a cigarette paper to reduce the unpleasant taste).

If you are contemplating using a 'risky' substance (e.g. what is left on a spoon after filtering), swallowing usually represents the safest way of getting it into the body.

For those who inject benzos (benzodiazepines) - often as crushed tablets - taking them by mouth or dissolving them under the tongue is by far the safer alternative and the effect, although slower to 'come on', will pretty much be the same.

Rectal Administration - 'Shafting'

The functions of the rectum are to store faeces and reabsorb fluid in order to prevent dehydration. It has an excellent supply of blood, and this means that anything introduced to the rectum is quickly absorbed. This includes your drugs. If you're considering this method, the following is recommended:

For liquids:

Mix and draw up into a syringe. Make sure the needle is removed from the syringe (essential!).

- Insert the tip of the syringe into the rectum*
- Push the plunger in.
- For solids -
- Wrap drugs in cigarette paper.
- Use lubricant if necessary.
- Insert by pushing the wrapped drugs inside your rectum.
- It is more effective if you have an empty rectum.

<http://aivl.org.au/veincare/?n=safereinjecting>