BRAVELY Sussed on CHEMSEX

WE THE BRAVE.co.za
MEN | SEX | LIFE
COMMON TERMS USED IN THIS BOOKLET

ART  Antiretroviral Treatment
AIDS  Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARVs  Antiretroviral Drugs
Bareback  Sex without a condom, often referred to as BB
CD4  White blood cells that are an essential part of the human immune system
HIV  Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MSM  Men who have Sex with Men
PEP  Post Exposure Prophylaxis
PrEP  Pre- Exposure Prophylaxis
Slam/Spike  Injecting drugs
STIs  Sexually Transmitted Infections
TasP  Treatment as Prevention
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Health4Men, an innovative project of the Anova Health Institute, was established in 2008 to take the lead in South Africa’s response to HIV among men who have sex with men (MSM). Health4Men has developed expertise in all areas of MSM sexual health, including HIV combination prevention and both STI and HIV treatment, and mental health.

We The Brave is an initiative of Anova Health Institute and The Elton John AIDS Foundation, dedicated to helping gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) lead healthy, sexual lives.

The We The Brave mission is to reduce the HIV prevalence in the MSM community in a sex-positive space that informs and empowers.
DRUGS AND SEX

LOOKING AFTER YOUR BODY

Many men associate drugs with sex. Some guys use drugs to make them feel more horny or to give them added confidence, others use drugs to make the sex feel more intense. Many guys use drugs to make the sex last much longer and some use drugs to get into kink, such as fisting or extended edging (sex or masturbation without coming). Some guys even avoid having sex unless they’re wired (high) on chems.

Drugs often influence who we have sex with, what sex acts we get into, how roughly we play and the duration of the sex. Irrespective of whether you’re HIV positive or negative, the sex you have when you’re using chems can be very risky for your health.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Drugs often make us feel incredibly horny. We may become less selective about guys we’re prepared to play with, or we may be more tempted to get into group play. Drugs also make us feel less inhibited: we may become less discerning about the sex we have and more likely to bareback (fuck without a condom). This exposes us to the risk of either infecting a partner with HIV or a sexually transmitted infection (STI) such as syphilis or gonorrhoea, or being infected ourselves. HIV is transmitted very easily through cum from a positive top entering an arse.

Rougher or extended sessions of fucking increase the already high likelihood of transmission because the fragile lining of the bottom’s arse can become
damaged, even if there are no signs of blood. Remember that just because someone thinks or says he is HIV negative, does not make it true.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Don’t use drugs as an excuse to bareback! Many guys manage to have great sex with condoms when they use chems. You can do this too if you want to look after your health.

If you anticipate having sex, make sure you have plenty of condoms and condom-friendly lube freely available. You may not want to search for a condom when you’re wired on drugs so make sure the condoms and lube are within reach. Talk to your partner. Agree on the sex you’re prepared to have with him (or them) before you guys use drugs, and help each other to abide by your agreement.

If you’re HIV positive and on treatment, set an alarm on your cell phone to remind you to take your meds. Drugs can make you lose track of time. See Health4Men’s Health Facts for Men booklet.

Don’t be tempted to mix different drugs or to take increasing amounts of drugs. Drugs can interact with each other and can increase your risk of overdosing.

Drink sufficient water but don’t overdo this. If your body overheats from vigorous sex, take a break and chill for a while.
DRUGS AND ARVs

Antiretroviral (ARV) drugs are pills used to control HIV for men who are living with HIV (HIV-positive). Adherence to your HIV treatment means taking your ARV pills correctly, at the right time and the right doses (amount) as the clinic told you to do. Taking your pills at the wrong time, either too early or too late, or missing doses altogether could make them less effective (less powerful to help you) and it may even stop working for you.

If you are an HIV-positive man and taking ARVs you are more likely to forget to take your medication correctly if you use recreational drugs or abuse alcohol. This means that unless you make plans to always take your ARV treatment correctly, HIV treatment may not be as effective.

Some ARVs are less safe than others if mixed with recreational drugs.

Keep in mind that PEP and PrEP are also types of ARV treatment, but for HIV-negative men. See Health4Men’s Health Facts for Men booklet and PrEP Facts flyer.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

If you’re on ARV treatment your kidneys and liver manage the levels of the medication in your body. Taking recreational drugs could place additional strain on your kidneys and liver. Mixing ARVs with recreational drugs could cause very high levels of the recreational drug in your bloodstream, leading to possible drug overdose.
Sometimes, recreational drugs lower the level of ARVs in your body, which could cause them to become ineffective.

Using recreational drugs suppresses your immune system. Such drugs often impact on your appetite or make it difficult to sleep, and without correct nutrition and proper sleep you could also be putting unnecessary strain on your body. Some people abuse Efavirenz (an ARV drug) by smoking it with tobacco or marijuana (dagga) which is very dangerous. Always use your ARV treatment correctly and never allow someone else to use your tablets.

**WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

If you use recreational substances ask your nurse or doctor whether these drugs will interact with your ARVs. When you first start taking ARVs, it takes a few weeks for your body to get used to them and for any side effects to disappear. It is best to avoid using recreational drugs during this period so that you get a clear sense of how the ARVs are affecting you.

Cutting down on recreational drugs, or not taking them at all will make it easier to remember to take your ARVs correctly, at the right time. Being adherent with your treatment will result in better treatment results.

Remember to drink plenty of fluids and to eat regularly when you do use recreational drugs. You will need enough sleep for your body to recover fully.
INJECTING DRUGS

LOOKING AFTER YOUR BODY

Guys often refer to injecting recreational drugs as slamming, spiking or pointing. Some drugs can be injected if it is a liquid, or a powder or crystal that can dissolve in water (such as heroin and crystal methamphetamine, also known as tik).

Injecting is preferred by some users because the full effects of the drug are experienced very quickly. This shorter, more intense effect can easily lead to both physical and psychological dependency developing more rapidly than with other methods of taking drugs.

Injecting drugs isn’t without risks, some of which can be avoided. We want to help you minimise these risks.

YOUR HEART AND CIRCULATORY SYSTEM

Your heart is the size of a man’s fist and is the hardest working muscle in your body. Blood flows to and from the heart through blood vessels. There are three types of blood vessel:

1. **Arteries** always carry blood flowing away from the heart, delivering oxygen and nutrients to your body.
2. **Veins** are major blood vessels that carry the oxygen-poor blood from the body back to your heart.
3. **Capillaries** are the tiniest vessels in the body, carrying blood to and from every cell.
Piercing an artery with a needle is extremely dangerous. The pressure of the blood in an artery is high and any puncture can result in rapid blood loss. You can only inject into a vein. If you insert the needle and blood starts spurting out rather than just oozing you have probably hit an artery and not a vein. Remove the needle immediately; apply pressure on the area and find medical help if the bleeding continues beyond a few minutes.

Never inject into a small vein (like you see on the back of your hands); these will be unable to cope with the bulk you’re injecting into them and could be damaged.

**YOUR BODY’S NATURAL DEFENCES**

You have natural defences against infection and illness.

1. **Your liver** detoxifies your body by filtering your blood and converting foreign substances, including recreational drugs and alcohol, into a format that your body can excrete.

2. **Your spleen** filters your blood by removing impurities and germs.

3. **Your skin** is your most visible defence. It forms a barrier that is nearly impossible for germs and other foreign materials to penetrate, unless it is broken. An unclean needle introduces germs directly into your blood. This requires that you need to pay special attention to how you prepare to inject.
Your liver and spleen initially filter everything you ingest into your body through your mouth. If you swallow a drug your liver works hard to break it down before it enters your bloodstream in order to protect your body, but when you inject drugs directly into your bloodstream this initial filtering system is bypassed. Continuous use of recreational drugs can harm your liver and spleen.

Piercing your skin with a needle and injecting directly into your bloodstream bypasses your skin’s ability to protect you against germs, especially if you use a dirty needle.

You can support these natural defences in several ways in order to minimise the potential harm caused by injecting drugs.

**BEFORE YOU INJECT – BE PREPARED**

In order to prevent germs and viruses, including HIV and hepatitis from entering your bloodstream you need to pay special attention to cleanliness when you prepare to inject.

Here’s what you should do:

1. **Ensure a clean preparation area.** The area where the drug will be prepared and the syringe filled must be cleaned in advance with warm soapy water or an alcohol swab to minimize the risk of germs.

2. **Ensure you have clean equipment.** Make sure you have everything you will need and that it is clean.
• Most importantly you must have a new syringe and needle that you know have not been used before. Only remove the syringe and needle from the packaging when you are ready to use them in order to keep them clean.

• You will also need sterile water, obtainable from any pharmacy, to dissolve the drug if it isn’t already a liquid. Never inject tap water but if you have no sterile water available boil tap water vigorously for at least 5 minutes before allowing it to cool.

Be aware that some microwave ovens may take longer for the water to boil sufficiently. Don’t use eye or ear drops.

• Make sure the spoon you use to dissolve the drug in is clean.

• Have alcohol swabs (wipes) handy to clean the skin where you want to inject to avoid introducing any germs present on your skin into your bloodstream.

• You will need a flame to heat the spoon. Be careful of having anything flammable in the area where you are preparing.

3. **Wash your hands properly with soap and warm water before you go any further.** If someone else is injecting you, ensure their hands are clean or that they wear latex gloves.

4. **Ensure your safety by not injecting when you’re alone.** Have someone with you who will be able to manage the situation in the event of anything going wrong, such as excessive bleeding or an overdose. Make sure they have access to a telephone in the event of an emergency.
5. **Avoid overdosing.** Injecting drugs causes a more intense reaction to the drug than smoking, inhaling or snorting, or administering it anally (sometimes referred to as booty bumping). If someone else is injecting you, make sure they know what amount of the drug to use for your injection. They may just assume your body can tolerate the drug quantity they administer to you, which may be too much for your body to cope with.

6. **Prepare for responsible sex.** Many guys use drugs to enhance sexual pleasure, and many drugs stimulate your libido (make you horny) and cause sexual disinhibition (reduced restraint and increased impulsivity). This leads men to have irresponsible sex when using drugs, increasing the risk of spreading HIV other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as syphilis and hepatitis.

You may be more likely to fuck without condoms (bareback), so have condoms and compatible lubrication accessible and visible to you as a reminder to remain responsible. Discuss responsible sex and health issues with your partner before you take drugs so that you can negotiate the ‘rules’ of the play before the drugs cloud your judgement. Support each other to abide by the rules in order to protect everyone involved.

7. **Plan how you will dispose of the needle and syringe.** Ensure that no one gets injured and that the needle isn’t used by anyone else; never throw needles into the rubbish bin! Small syringes can be disposed of in an empty cool drink can. If you received the needle and syringe from an exchange programme it is likely that they will want you to return used needles to them before they’ll issue you with a new batch.
8. **Plan to take any necessary medication.** Once the drug has kicked in you may forget to take any necessary medication, including ARV treatment if you are HIV-positive. Set an alarm to remind you to take your meds!

9. **Measure the dosage – carefully!** Always be mindful of the dose you will be taking. Rather be safe than sorry.

10. **Cooking time!** If you’re dissolving your drug in water, apply heat to assist the process. Avoid burning yourself.

11. **Use a filter to draw the drug into the syringe.** The mix can contain non-soluble materials such as bits of grit which must be filtered out. Draw the liquid into the syringe through a small ball of condensed cotton wool (roll it between your clean fingers to condense it), or you can cut up a tampon. Never use a cigarette filter. To be safe, ensure all bits of grit have been removed by emptying the syringe and filtering the solution repeatedly.

12. **Remove any air bubbles in the syringe.** Flick the barrel with the needle pointed upwards and press the plunger gently to expel the bubbles that collect at the top. Failing to remove all bubbles can be very dangerous.
SAFER INJECTING – A FEW POINTERS

1. **Identify the site where you want to inject.** It may be more convenient to inject into a vein in your arm, but avoid injecting into the exact same spot repeatedly. The tissue can harden, making it difficult to inject there again, or you could damage the vein. Do not inject into an area that feels swollen or inflamed, or where you have a rash or any sore on your skin.

2. **Carefully clean the area of skin with an alcohol swab.** This will reduce the chances of any germs on your skin entering directly into your bloodstream, or of developing an abscess (sore).

3. **Use your tourniquet** - something you use to temporarily slow the flow of blood so that your veins become more prominent, and therefore easier to see and inject into. It is usually applied to your upper arm. The tourniquet should be tight enough to raise a vein, but not so tight that it stops blood flowing into the arm through the artery.

   It is important that whatever tourniquet you use must be easy to remove immediately after injecting but after you remove the needle. Anything that isn’t easily and quickly released, especially if you are feeling the effects of the drug, can cause harm. Some guys prefer to use a piece of rubber tubing tied around their arm with one end of the tube held in their mouth for easy release.

4. **When injecting ensure the needle’s hole faces upward and is eased into the vein gently at a shallow angle** (between 10 and 35 degrees) to minimize the risk of penetrating through the vein entirely. Choose the
largest vein that is easiest to see so that you don’t inject into the tissue surrounding the vein.

The blood inside veins flows towards the heart. Always inject in the same direction as the blood is flowing. In order to prevent stress on the vein the needle must be pointing towards the heart.

Afterwards remove the tourniquet, then the needle and maintain firm pressure on the site for a few minutes to prevent bruising.

ENSURING YOUR SAFETY

You will experience the effects of the drug very soon after the injection. Before you relax you need to dispose of the needle to avoid any injury to yourself or to others. Use a rigid container such as an empty cool drink can or a bottle.

Remind yourself and your partner or partners of your agreed rules regarding responsible sex.

If you’re dancing, having extended or vigorous sex or cleaning your house, your body could overheat. Slow down, take a break and chill for a few minutes. Drink enough water so that you remain hydrated, but don’t overdo this! Too much water can harm your kidneys. Your judgement will be impaired, so avoid taking more of the drug, or taking other drugs while you’re high.
THINGS CAN GO WRONG

This booklet has given you some information to reduce the harm associated with injecting drugs. Being well informed is your best defence against harming yourself or others.

- Injecting speeds up the process of becoming hooked or addicted to drugs.
- Viruses such as HIV and hepatitis C are very easily spread by sharing needles.
- Injecting can cause serious health problems such as painful abscesses (sores) and skin infections, viral infections, heart problems and blood clots.
- The risk of overdosing is higher if you inject.
- Hitting an artery with a needle can be dangerous.
- Drugs lead to sexual disinhibition and sexual risk-taking.
- Drugs can cause mental health problems.
ARE YOU CONCERNED THAT YOUR USE OF CHEMS MAY BE GETTING OUT OF CONTROL?

SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE

SANCA
Toll Free Number
086 14 72622
www.sancanational.info

Cape Town Drug Counselling Centre
Observatory 021 447 8026
Mitchells Plain 021 397 0103
Atlantis 021 571 7180
www.drugcentre.org.za

Narcotics Anonymous South Africa
083 900 69 62
www.na.org.za

Lifeline Counselling
011 715 2000 or 082 231 0805
www.lifeline.org.za

MAKE THE CALL,
JOIN A GROUP OR SPEAK TO A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL
STAY INFORMED

WETHEBRAVE.CO.ZA
Check out the map on wethebrave.co.za to find your nearest, free clinic that has been trained by Health4Men to be gay-friendly and non-judgemental to your sexual health needs. You can also access independent professionals on there! Your health is important to us, all you have to do is, BE BRAVE!

HEALTH4MEN
Go online to get topical HIV and STI-related info for gay and other men who have sex with men or post a question if you don’t find the information you’re looking for. Discreet and confidential information instantly.

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facebook health4men.co.za   facebook Health4MenTop2Bottom   twitter @H4Mtop2btm
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