

Drugs, alcohol, and gay men

Information and
some things to think about

SÉRO ZÉRO

COORDINATION

Robert Rousseau, Executive Director
Action Séro Zéro

RESEARCH AND COPYWRITING

Christian Joubert, project leader

TEXT REVISION

Isabelle Vialle-Soubranne, Les points sur les i

Translated by Helen D. Elliot

COMPUTER GRAPHICS

Anik Rousseau (Nikitchi), Yanick Paradis

REVIEW COMMITTEE

Dr. Pierre Côté, Clinique médicale Quartier Latin,
Dany Leblond, CSSS Jeanne-Mance (Jeanne-Mance
health and social services centre) Guillaume Perron,
Le Mouvement d'Information et d'Entraide dans la Lutte
contre le Sida à Québec (MIELS-Québec) Bernard
Ouellet, Action Séro Zéro, Éric Châles, Hervé Combaret

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Health Department, Louis-Marie Drolet, Ministère de la
Santé et des Services sociaux, Bruno St-Pierre, Mouvement
d'Aide et d'Information Sida Bas-Saint-Laurent (M.A.IN.S
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ARGUS is a survey of HIV, viral hepatitis, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and associated risk behaviours among Montreal men who have sex with men (MSM). In total, 1,957 men answered the 2005 survey questionnaire.

Casual partner, regular partner living with HIV, regular partner with unknown HIV status.



SÉRO ZÉRO

www.sero-zero.qc.ca



Introduction

In a context where a certain relaxing of safe sexual behaviours has been observed and where HIV/AIDS continues to be a true threat in the gay community, the impact of drug and alcohol use on sexuality is not to be overlooked.

Risk taking can be explained by a number of factors including drug and alcohol use.

It is true that taking drugs or alcohol can be a source of pleasure. It is also true that excessive, chronic use can cause suffering.

Consequently, the purpose of this brochure is neither to encourage you to take drugs or alcohol nor to encourage you to abstain. Rather, its purpose is to give you the information you need to make informed choices about drugs and alcohol, if you are taking them.

With this brochure, we are just asking you to take care of yourself!

The Séro-Zéro team

A word about mixing



It is not uncommon for people to mix various substances during the same period. They may have any number of reasons for doing so.

Some of these reasons are:

Wanting to amplify the effect of the substances (increase the buzz);

Wanting to prolong the pleasant effects of substances;

Wanting to counteract the unpleasant effects of another substance (e.g., using Viagra, Levitra, or Cialis to counter erectile problems due to taking methamphetamines).



Nevertheless, by taking different substances at the same time, you increase the risk of unpleasant effects and of experiencing complications that may be serious.



and a word about tolerance

Drug tolerance occurs when you take a substance over a prolonged period of time. Your body gets used to the effects. Result? You need a higher and higher dose to feel the same level of pleasant effects you had the first time. Tolerance of pleasant effects often develops faster than tolerance of unpleasant effects. Concretely, this means that you would tend to want to increase the doses, but when you do so, you feel the unpleasant effects even more!

Some people decide to stop taking a substance when they develop a tolerance for it. Then, a few weeks later, they start taking it again. If this describes you, you must be careful with the dose you take after you have stopped for a while, because your body could react badly if you take too much too quickly.

After not taking a substance for a while, you should cut down on the doses you were used to taking in the past.

Some substances have a higher potential for creating tolerance than others. You will find this information in the substance descriptions that follow. They are grouped into three categories: depressants, stimulants, and hallucinogens/hypnotics.

Depressants

Depressants are substances that slow down your brain and body activity. In low doses, they give you a feeling of calm and well-being. This category includes alcohol, nitrites (poppers), and gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB), among others.



Alcohol

How is it used?
You drink it.

What are the effects?
You feel euphoric, less shy, less stressed; you talk more, and are less inhibited.

sex and alcohol

Moderate drinking can stimulate your sexual desire but abusive, long-term alcohol use can decrease this desire and lead to erectile problems.

What are the effects?
You feel euphoric, less shy, less stressed; you talk more, and are less inhibited.

What are the possible undesirable effects?
Your sense of judgment may be impaired, you may have difficulty expressing yourself clearly, and you may lack coordination. You may also become aggressive and feel emotionally unstable.

And if you drink too much (overdose)?
There may be various consequences: you could throw up, black out, go into an ethylic coma, and even die. Not to mention the hangover.

What are the effects of abusive and chronic (long-term) alcohol use?
You may develop tolerance to alcohol and a psychological and physical dependence on it. It can weaken your immune system, cause nervous disorders, and damage your heart and liver, etc.

Danger !
When you drink alcohol, try to avoid taking drugs at the same time. You can never anticipate the effects of mixing the two. For example, mixing alcohol with GHB can cause amnesia.

Alcohol + GHB = Danger!



Poppers (also called *rush*)

How do you take them?

Poppers are available in liquid form in bottles. You sniff the fumes from the bottle.

What are the effects?

The effects are almost immediate and last a short time (about 2 minutes). You feel euphoric and experience an intense inner heat, and you feel less inhibited.

What are the possible undesirable effects?

You may have headaches, nausea, and you may throw up.

And if you take too much (overdose)?

You may experience extreme dizziness, your breathing may become depressed, and you may lose consciousness.

What are the effects of abusive, chronic (long-term) use?

You may feel confused, have hallucinations, a runny nose, inflammation of the mucous membranes of the nose, and a yellowish crust around the nose and mouth.

Danger !

Avoid poppers if you have taken a medication for treating erectile dysfunction (Viagra, Levitra, or Cialis) the past 24 hours. Mixing the two may markedly increase dilatation of your blood vessels and dangerously reduce blood pressure, causing serious damage that may result in death.

Viagra (or Levitra or Cialis) + poppers = Danger!

sex and poppers

Poppers give the impression of increased sensuality. If you sniff poppers when you start to have sex, you may lose your erection. If you sniff them just before orgasm, the orgasm will be more intense. Because poppers cause blood vessels to dilate, they relax the anus muscles, facilitating anal penetration.



GHB

(also called liquid ecstasy, liquid X, etc.)

How is it taken?

GHB is available in powder, capsule, tablet, or liquid form. In the gay community, it is mostly in liquid form, which you drink.

What are the effects?

The effects begin 5 to 30 minutes after GHB is taken and last from 1 to 3 hours on average. You feel euphoric and sexual, more relaxed, and much less inhibited.

What are the possible undesirable effects?

You may feel sleepy and experience a loss of coordination. You may also have a general loss of sensation in your body..

And if you take too much (overdose)?

There can be various consequences, from vomiting to a decreased heart rate to a coma.

In some cases of fatal poisoning connected to GHB it was found that other substances had been taken at the same time. So, to avoid an overdose, take small amounts at a time in order to see how your body reacts.

What are the effects of abuse and chronic (long-term) use?

Excessive prolonged use of GHB leads to tolerance and physical dependence.

Danger !

If you take GHB, avoid taking other depressants (e.g., alcohol), at the same time. This combination can lead to amnesia, even death.

Stimulants

Stimulants are substances that stimulate your brain and body activity. They make you feel energetic, invincible, and they increase your self-confidence. They also suppress appetite and sleep. But be careful: stimulants have a high potential for psychological dependence. Among the drugs in this category we find cocaine, amphetamines (speed), and methamphetamines (crystal meth).



Cocaine (also called powder, coke, etc.)

How is it taken?

Cocaine is available in powder or “rock” form (crack, freebase). In powder form, it is snorted or injected. In rock form, it is smoked. In the gay community, cocaine is above all snorted.

What are the effects?

The state of euphoria (high) is short, lasting 30 minutes to 1 hour. You feel happy and in great shape. You are less inhibited and feel more self-confident. If you smoke or inject cocaine, the effects are faster and more intense (there is a rush, often compared to a sexual orgasm).

And if you take too much (overdose)?

You may develop psychological problems, have convulsions, feel an increase in body temperature (which can result in death), have a cerebral hemorrhage, or cardiac problems.

What are the effects of abusive, chronic (long-term) use?

You may develop tolerance and a strong psychological dependence. The risk of dependence is even higher if you smoke or inject cocaine. You may feel aggressive and paranoid, you may lose weight, and you may have digestive problems. Taking cocaine can also lead to a number of other problems depending on how you take it, such as problems with your nasal septum if you snort cocaine).

Danger!

If you drink alcohol when you take cocaine, the drug stays in your body longer. Mixing the two produces a substance called cocaethylene, which increases the intensity and duration of the effect, but which also has toxic effects on the heart and liver.

HIV, hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, and cocaine

Do not share your drug equipment when using cocaine (straw, if you snort; needle if you inject; crack pipe or glass pipe if you smoke it). A little contaminated blood on your drug equipment can be enough to transmit HIV, hepatitis B virus (HBV), and hepatitis C virus (HCV).

Sharing your drug equipment= Danger! sex and cocaine

Cocaine sharpens your sexual perceptions and increases desire. It can also prolong and intensify orgasm. But taking cocaine may make it difficult for you to have an erection. And taking cocaine over the long term may result in a decrease in desire for sex.



Speed (also called peaches)

How is it taken?

Speed is available in tablet form. It is usually swallowed.

What are the effects?

The state of euphoria (high) lasts many hours during which you are in a good mood and feel great. Because of its effects, speed is often taken at raves and afterhours in order to stay awake all night.

What are the possible undesirable effects?

When the high is over you may feel a “down” (suicidal ideas, depression, serious self-doubts) that can last several days. You may also feel anxious, have a dry mouth, abdominal cramps, heart rate problems, and you may grind your teeth.

And if you take too much (overdose)?

You may develop psychological problems, have convulsions, feel an increase in body temperature (which can result in death), have a cerebral hemorrhage, or cardiac problems.

What are the effects of abuse and of chronic (long-term) use?

You may develop tolerance and a strong psychological dependence. You may be aggressive and paranoid, lose weight, and have digestive problems.

sex and speed

When you take speed, you almost always feel an increase in libido. In some cases, temporary erectile dysfunction is possible. Long-term abuse can lead to a decrease in sexual desire and sexual interest.



Crystal meth

(also called Meth, tina, ici, ect.)

How is it taken?

Crystal meth is a very powerful drug (twice as powerful as speed). It is available in crystal, granular, or powder form and it can be smoked, swallowed, snorted, or injected. In the gay community, crystal meth is most often smoked.

What are the effects?

Smoking crystal meth creates a rush (of brief duration, often compared to a sexual orgasm). This is followed by a sense of euphoria (high) that lasts from 8 to 24 hours. You feel happy and energetic: you do not feel the need to eat or sleep.

What are the possible undesirable effects?

When the high is over you may feel a “down” (suicidal ideas, depression, serious self-doubts) that can last several days. You may also feel anxious, have a dry mouth, abdominal cramps, heart-rate problems, and you may grind your teeth. Crystal meth can also damage the liver.

And if you take too much (overdose)?

There is a high risk of overdose. You may develop psychological problems, have convulsions, feel an increase in body temperature (which can result in death), develop respiratory failure, have a cerebral hemorrhage, or cardiac problems..

What are the effects of abuse and of chronic (long-term) use?

You may develop tolerance and a strong psychological dependence. You may feel aggressive and paranoid, and you may lose weight, and have digestive problems. Crystal meth can also damage the immune system.

HIV, hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, and crystal meth

Do not share your drug equipment (pipes, syringes). A little contaminated blood on your drug equipment can be enough to transmit HIV, hepatitis B virus (HBV), and hepatitis C virus (HCV).

Sharing drug equipment = Danger!

sex and Crystal meth

If you take crystal meth, you may feel extremely wild and horny. You feel ready to do anything on a sexual level, and you want to push your limits to the max. Your orgasm is also more intense. Nevertheless, you may be unable to have an erection. Abuse and long-term use may lead to a decrease in sexual desire and to a decreased interest in sex.

Because crystal meth suppresses inhibition, its use may lead you to agree to unprotected anal penetration and put you at risk of contracting HIV.

Hallucinogens Hypnotics

Hallucinogens/Hypnotics are substances that strongly influence your sensations, your emotions, and your perception of reality. MDMA (ecstasy), ketamine, and cannabis (pot), among other drugs, fall into this category.



Ecstasy

(also called E, love pill, etc.)

How is it taken?

Ecstasy is available in powder, capsule, or tablet form, the tablets often being of various colours and stamped with various logos. In tablet form, it is swallowed.

What are the effects?

It takes about 40 minutes to reach a state of euphoria (high), which then lasts from 3 to 6 hours. You feel happy, sensual, empathic, and stimulated (less so than with speed or cocaine). You feel less inhibited and feel the desire to get close to others (physically and psychologically). You feel greater self-confidence and your senses feel much more acute. Because of its effects, ecstasy is often taken at afterhours and raves.

What are the possible undesirable effects? When the high is over you may feel a “down” (suicidal ideas, depression, serious self-doubts) that can last several days. You may also feel anxiety, confusion, paranoia, and insomnia, have a dry mouth, blurred vision, cardiac palpitations, headaches, vomiting, and you may grind your teeth.

And if you take too much (overdose)?

You may feel panic, develop toxic psychosis, have a serious increase in body temperature, or convulsions.

What are the effects of abuse and chronic (long-term) use?

You may develop various psychiatric problems: hallucinations, panic attacks, anorexia, etc. Ecstasy may cause liver damage. You may quickly develop tolerance and a strong psychological dependence. Its effects on memory are not really known, but some impact is possible.

sex and ecstasy

If you take ecstasy, you will probably feel very sensual. On the other hand, you will have trouble reaching orgasm.

Ecstasy: a few tips

Ecstasy may lead to dehydration by reducing your thirst: it is therefore important that you drink (water or fruit juice) regularly, but not excessively. Ecstasy can also reduce the urge to urinate: you should force yourself to go to the bathroom from time to time.



Ketamine

(also called Special K, K, vitamin K)

How is it taken?

“K” is a powder sold in a small bottle (bumper), which is usually snorted. One inhalation is called a bump.

What are the effects?

The effects are felt about 4 minutes after the drug is taken and last from 5 minutes to over an hour. You feel euphoric, stimulated, and less inhibited, as if you were floating.

What are the possible undesirable effects?

You may feel confused, aggressive, paranoid, and dizzy; and you may have difficulty expressing yourself clearly, have numbness in the extremities, and generally have a bad trip (called a K hole).

And if you take too much (overdose)?

You may lose consciousness and then vomit (which can lead to death). You may also experience depressed breathing, have a cardiovascular accident (CVA), convulsions, and toxic psychosis.

What are the effects of abuse and chronic (long-term) use?

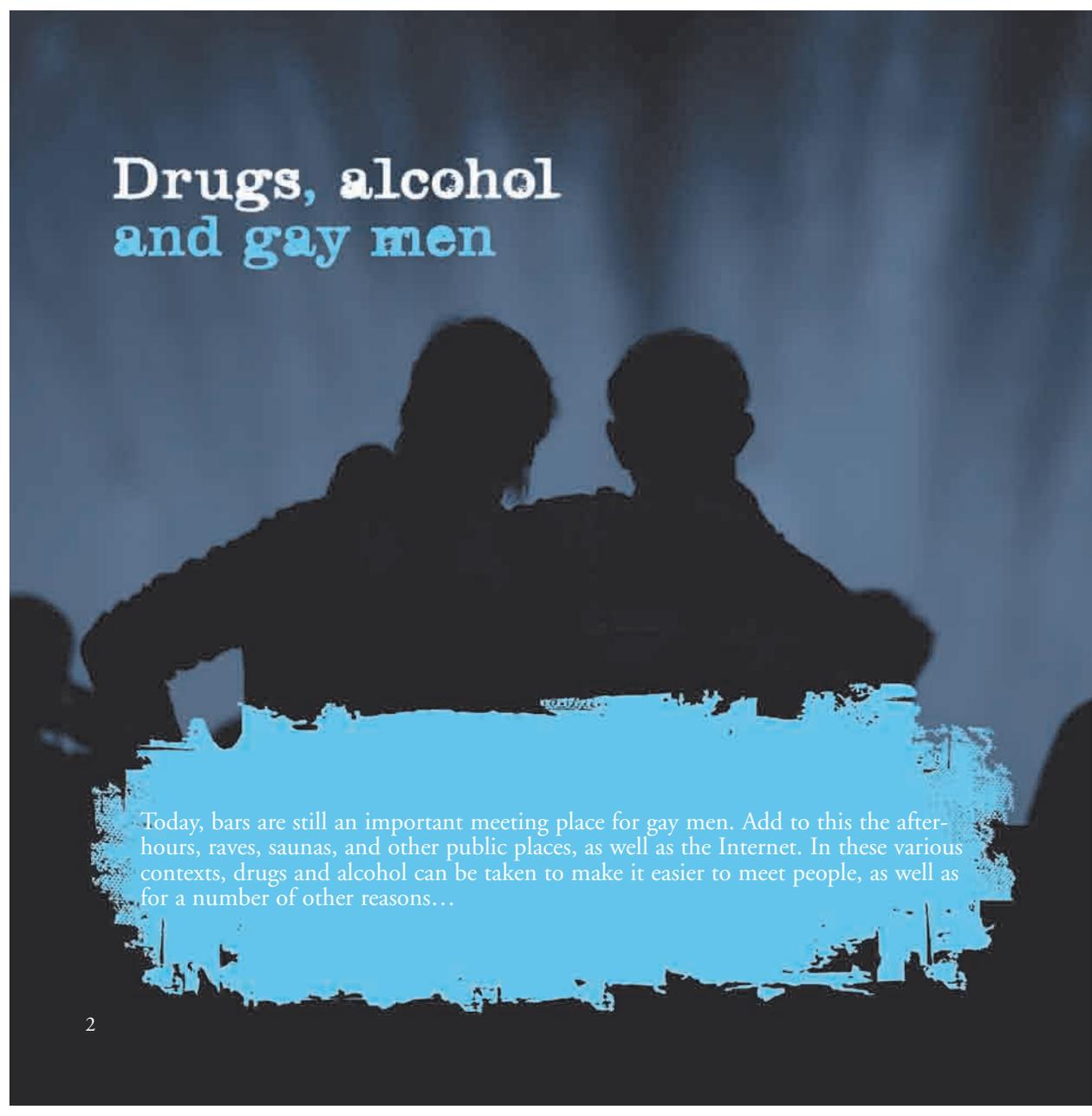
Your memory may be affected. You may develop tolerance and a strong psychological dependence.

HIV, hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, and ketamine

Do not share bumpers. A little contaminated blood on your drug equipment can be enough to transmit HIV, hepatitis B virus (HBV), and hepatitis C virus (HCV).

Sharing a bumper = Danger!

Drugs, alcohol and gay men

The background of the page is a dark, moody photograph. In the center, the silhouettes of two men are shown from behind, embracing each other. They are standing at a bar counter, which is visible as a horizontal line across the middle of the image. The lighting is low, creating a sense of intimacy and atmosphere. The overall color palette is dark with some highlights on the bar counter and the men's clothing.

Today, bars are still an important meeting place for gay men. Add to this the after-hours, raves, saunas, and other public places, as well as the Internet. In these various contexts, drugs and alcohol can be taken to make it easier to meet people, as well as for a number of other reasons...



Pot (also called weed, mari, hash, etc.)

Sex and Pot how is it taken?

Cannabis is mainly taken as marijuana (pot). It is smoked in cigarettes (joints) or in a pipe. It can also be eaten, mixed with food.

What are the effects?

The effects are felt after a few minutes and last about 3 hours. You feel good, you feel relaxed, and you may feel like laughing. Your senses are also heightened. If you eat pot, it takes longer to feel the effects, but they last longer.

What are the undesirable effects?

You may have red eyes and a dry mouth, your attention span and ability to concentrate may be reduced, and you may feel anxiety, paranoia, and dizziness.

And if you take too much (overdose)?

Pot is the least harmful of all illicit drugs and the least likely to result in an overdose. You may, however, feel fatigue, confusion, paranoia, and disorientation.

What are the effects of abuse and chronic (long-term) use?

Dependence that is mainly psychological is possible. You may also damage your throat and lungs, and feel a drop in motivation.

AIDS and pot

Pot stimulates the appetite, which is why it is sometimes used in the treatment of AIDS. It also diminishes the sensation of pain.

sex and pot

Under the effect of pot, your sexual and sensual sensations are more intense. But if you take large quantities of pot over long periods of time, you could experience decreased libido.



Drugs, alcohol, and sex

We can honestly say that a lot of people drink or take drugs before or during sexual intercourse. It is not uncommon to have a glass of wine or a joint to get rid of stress, or to take a popper to reduce inhibitions.



It can be cool...

It's true that it can be enjoyable to have drugs or alcohol when sex is involved.

These substances:

Help you to interact, and facilitate sexual encounters when taken moderately;

Increase desire and help you to relax, and to make you more sexual;

Help you to loosen up;

Are sometimes used to repress or numb certain fears: the fear of not being as good as expected (pressure to perform), fear of not pleasing the other person, fear of rejection, etc.;

Can be used for a trip you wouldn't dare do without drugs;

Can help you break the routine and add a little spice to your life as a couple.

...but

While it is possible to drink and take drugs and still have safe sex, taking these substances may also lead you to take sex-related risks by:

Impairing your sense of judgment: leading you to make false presuppositions about what is or is not dangerous (e.g., telling yourself that penetration without a condom is not risky provided that your partner does not ejaculate inside you);

Affecting your ability to negotiate safe sex;

Decreasing your interest in protecting your health or that of your partner;

Giving you the impression that you are invincible to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), because you tell yourself that it happens only to other people;

Leading you to believe that you are safe from secondary infection if you are seropositive;

Telling yourself that if you have unprotected sex only once you are not at risk;

Decreasing your commitment to safe sex;

Giving you an excuse not to use a condom.

“... You're more easily influenced. You do things you may not normally do, and may well regret the next day.” – Benoît, age 28.

Another word of caution about drugs and alcohol: Think about it, if you are unable to experience your sexuality without taking these substances. Always having sex under the effect of drugs or alcohol may result in your finding sex boring, or difficult to experience sober.

Try experiencing your sexuality without these substances from time to time. Making love without drugs or alcohol can be just as satisfying.

A few facts

Men who have sex with other men continue to be the group the most affected by HIV (53% of cases in Quebec at the end of 2005);

About 30% of gay men living with HIV do not know their serological status;

According to the Argus survey of gay men, at least once in the preceding 6 months, nearly 30% of sexually active respondents had receptive anal sex unprotected by a condom with a partner considered at risk;

From the same study, here are the percentages of men who took at least one of the following substances two hours before or during sex:

Substances taken	% of men
Alcohol	73.3 %
Pot	38.4 %
Poppers	29.6 %
Cocaine	20.8 %
Ecstasy	16 %
Speed	15.7 %
GHB	15.2 %
Ketamine	10.8 %
Crystal meth	9.1 %

All drugs and alcohol may lead to risky sex, but poppers, which are often taken when having sex, seem especially to be implicated in risk taking.

Did you have risky sex?

Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) may be prescribed in cases where a condom has broken during anal sex or in cases of unprotected anal sex with a seropositive partner or a partner of unknown serological status.

The purpose of PEP is to prevent HIV infection. Treatment must begin in the hours following sexual intercourse (the maximum being 72 hours). PEP consists of taking medication against HIV for a few weeks.

For access to PEP, go to a hospital emergency room or to a special clinic (e.g., l'Actuel and Quartier-Latin clinics in Montreal).

Given the serious side effects of PEP (vomiting, diarrhea, marked fatigue, etc.) medical personnel will evaluate the risk and the relevance of prescribing.

A few words

When you have taken drugs or alcohol and you feel less prepared to have safe sex, explore other sexual practices: caressing, kissing, fellatio, rimming, etc. Anal penetration is not a must;

Always carry condoms and lubricant with you:
you never know what may happen;

Find ways to remind yourself to have safe sex
(e.g., wear a special bracelet, write a code on your wrist, etc.);

If you plan to take someone home with you, have condoms and lubricant readily available just about everywhere because you never know where you will have sex;

Remember, you have the last word about using a condom.

A few more thoughts

When you have sex, maybe you expect your partner to be the one to bring up the question of using a condom and to insist that you use one. This is probably even more likely if you have taken something. Do you feel capable of bringing up the question if your partner doesn't?

Do you feel that you have to drink or take drugs every time you have sex? If so, why?

If you do have risky sex, how will you feel about it in the morning?

Why would you want to risk your health for a high that lasts a few minutes?

How are you going to get through the weeks of waiting for the results of an HIV test after risky sex? And how do you plan to live with the side effects of PEP?

If you know that you already have an STI, how would you live with the thought that you could transmit the infection to another person?

Are there factors other than your taking drugs that could lead you to have risky sex? If so, what are they? For example, are you afraid of not pleasing your partner? Are you currently going through a period of intense emotions? Are you intimidated by a specific type of partner or particular atmosphere?

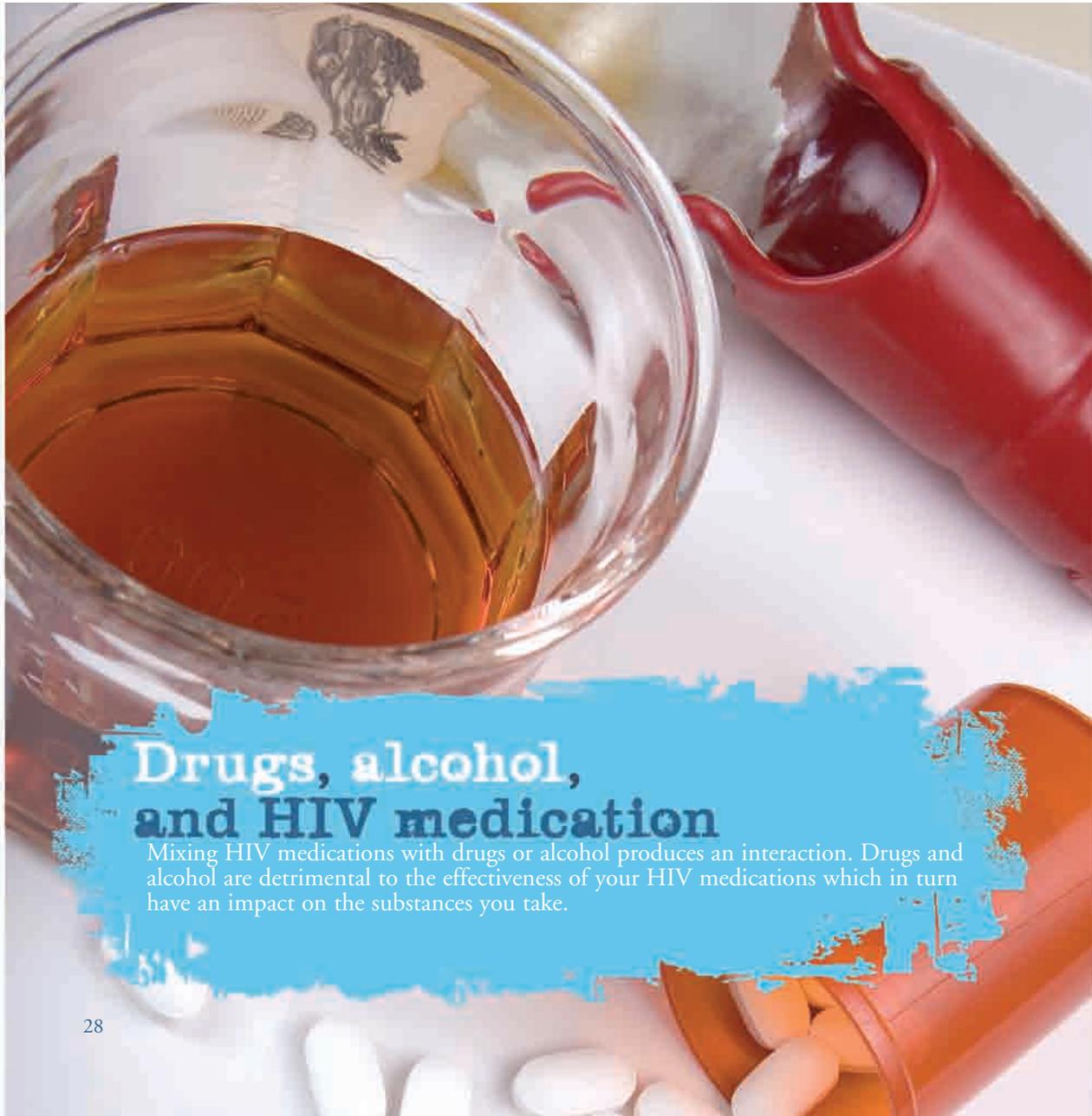
To learn more about STIs,

here are three sites:

Action Séro Zéro
www.sero-zero.qc.ca

Clinique médicale L'Actuel
www.cliniquelactuel.com

www.sexualityandu.ca

A composite image featuring a glass of amber liquid, a red pill bottle, and an orange pill bottle with pills spilling out. The text is overlaid on a blue brushstroke background.

Drugs, alcohol, and HIV medication

Mixing HIV medications with drugs or alcohol produces an interaction. Drugs and alcohol are detrimental to the effectiveness of your HIV medications which in turn have an impact on the substances you take.

Alcohol

The damage alcohol can cause to the liver is well known. Because the liver is essential to the absorption of HIV medications, it is easy to understand how drinking alcohol can seriously compromise their effectiveness.

Drugs

For various reasons, the interactions that result from mixing HIV medications with drugs are not as well known. Nevertheless, we know that some drugs like pot seem less harmful than GHB or ketamine, to name only these, if they are mixed with HIV medications.

Most of the time, your HIV medications leave more drugs circulating in your body. Mixing can lead to undesirable effects, even to an overdose. For example, the effect of methamphetamines (crystal meth) is two to three times more powerful in people under HIV medications (especially medication including ritonavir).

Sticking to treatment

Drugs and alcohol can also harm your HIV treatment by reducing your compliance to treatment. If you take drugs or alcohol, you may forget to take your medications or even decide to stop taking them. Failure to take your medication as prescribed may result in an increased viral load and a decrease in CD4 cells. HIV may even become resistant to your medications.

We strongly suggest that you talk to your physician about your drug or alcohol use. The physician will inform you of the possible consequences and adjust your HIV medication to take into account your drug history.

Gay bars, afterhours, and raves

You want to dance all night and “party.” You want to draw on the energy of the crowd, to feel its vibes. You want to be part of the group. You want to make it easier to meet other people, and maybe even have physical contact with other guys. These are just a few of the reasons that may lead you to want to take drugs or alcohol.

A few tips for making your night a success:

Make sure you have friends around to decrease the probability of a bad trip. And if you do have a bad trip, you have people there to help you if you need it;

Instead of taking your drugs or drinking your alcohol all at once, spread out their use throughout the night: this way, you can see how you react to their effects;

Decide about your drug and alcohol use before you go out (e.g., how much you will take throughout the night);

Avoid mixing drugs. If you do mix them, take them in small quantities to see how you react to these combinations;

Avoid mixing drugs and alcohol;

Be sure to be in good physical and psychological shape;

To help you get through the down that follows when you take cocaine, speed, crystal meth, or ecstasy, get plenty of rest, sleep, and food;

Make sure some friends are around, if you feel alone;

Remember that if you don't want to use drugs or alcohol, there are alternatives: have some energy drinks, sleep a little before you go to an afterhours spot, etc.

Some advice

If you take HIV medications and you take drugs, take them in small doses to see how you react;

Tell a friend about what you are taking. In this way, someone will know about your situation should you not feel well.

RECREATIONAL VS. PROBLEM DRUG USE

Occasional use of drugs or alcohol does not necessarily make you dependent on them. Here is the difference between recreational drug use and use that may be a problem.

Recreational use

You drink or use drugs for recreational purposes when there is a special event or moment (party with friends, etc.), often when you are socializing. You like to “party,” but just once in a while. You control your drug use, it does not harm you, and it is not the most important thing in your life.

Problem use

Drinking or using drugs becomes a problem as soon as they begin to have a negative impact on your life; if, for example, you need to get drunk every weekend or smoke a joint every night. Another thing to look out for is if you tend to isolate yourself when drinking or using drugs. .

Using drugs or alcohol becomes problematic when they begin to harm your mental, physical, sexual, social, or economical well-being.

At the extreme of problem drug use is dependence. This is a complex phenomenon that includes biological, psychological, and social aspects. Dependence can be psychological, physical, or both. When you become dependent on a substance, you lose control of your drug use—it takes control of you. You can no longer get along without taking one or more substances.

“I didn’t enjoy it anymore because everything revolved around ‘maybe we’ll do drugs’ or ‘we’re going to do drugs’ ... It really wasn’t fun anymore.” – Jean, age 40.

How can you tell if you are dependent?

A few ways to tell

You use drugs or alcohol repeatedly and on a chronic basis, even if it has a negative impact on your life (health, work, relations with others, etc.);

You limit your day-to-day activities in order to drink or do drugs;

Drinking or using drugs is more important than your essential needs like eating and sleeping;

If you stop drinking or taking drugs, you feel physically or psychologically unwell (what we call withdrawal symptoms);

When you stop drinking or taking drugs, you feel an intense need to start (which we call a craving).

Here is a chart that illustrates the dependence phenomenon
Cycle of Dependence



Some substances have a greater potential for creating dependence than others.
See the section Drugs, alcohol, and their effects, p. 8

Self-evaluation test on your drug and alcohol use

Here is a test that will give you an idea of your profile as a drug or alcohol user. Depending on the number of YES answers you get, you should think about whether you have a problem with drugs or alcohol and whether you should ask for help.

	YES	NO
I sometimes drink or take drugs to escape problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drinking or taking drugs helps me to function	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The people close to me complain that I drink or take drugs too much	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I sometimes feel guilty after I drink or take drugs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I drink or take drugs to solve even the most insignificant problem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I tend to hide my drinking or drug taking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It takes an effort for me to reduce my drug or alcohol use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I need to drink or take more drugs than before in order to get the same effect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using drugs or alcohol has caused me the following problems:		
Physical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emotional	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I take drugs or alcohol on an empty stomach, when I get up	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I tend to isolate myself when taking drugs or alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I sometimes get aggressive after using drugs or alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a hard time abstaining from drugs or alcohol over several days	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you feel that you need help, we suggest that you call Drug Help and Referral (see the Resources section). You should also know that there are resources adapted to the reality of gay and bisexual men.

Get informed!

Sources: Domrémy-Montréal, Carrefour Ubald-Villeneuve and Toxquebec.com.
Action Séro Zéro slightly altered the wording of the questions of this test.

Ressources

Association des sexologues du Québec

To find a sexologist.

www.associationdessexologues.com

514-270-9289

Centre de santé et de services sociaux (CSSS)

To find the local health and social services network in your area, dial:

1-800-363-1363 (then dial 1)

Clinique médicale l'Actuel

www.cliniquelactuel.com

514-524-1001

Clinique médicale Quartier Latin

www.cliniquequartierlatin.ca

514-285-5500

Drug help and referral

A bilingual, confidential, and anonymous telephone information, referral, and help line for the drug dependent, their loved ones, and for social services stakeholders.

Among the services offered, this organization can help you to find the resources available in your area and can help you to understand the consequences of use and abuse of alcohol, drugs, and medications

Help line available 24 hours a day,
7 days a week.

Montreal: 514-527-2626

Other regions: 1 800-265-2626

Gai écoute

Confidential, anonymous help line if you want to talk about your sexual orientation, about the difficulties you are experiencing, or to inform yourself about the organizations sensitized to gay realities in your area.

Help line from 8 am to 3 am, 7 days a week.

Montreal: 514-866-0103

Other regions: 1-888-505-1010

Gay line - www.gayline.qc.ca

The mission of Gay line is to provide a high quality free and confidential help and information telephone and online service in English for gender and/or sexual minorities.

Help line from 7 pm to 11pm, 7 days a week.

Montreal: 514-866-5090

Other regions: 1 888-505-1010

Ordre des conseillers et conseillères d'orientation et des psychoéducateurs et psychoéducatrices du Québec

To help you find a guidance counsellor or psychoeducator

www.occoppq.qc.ca

Montreal: 514-737-4717

Other regions: 1-800-363-2643

Ordre des psychologues du Québec

To help you find a psychologist.

www.ordrepsy.qc.ca

Montreal: 514-738-1223

Other regions: 1-800-561-1223

Ordre professionnel des travailleurs sociaux du Québec

To help you find a social worker.

www.optsq.org

Montreal: 514-731-3925

Other regions: 1-888-731-9420

Regroupement professionnel des sexologues du Québec

To help you find a sexologist.

www.rpsq.org - rpsq@rpsq.org

Montreal: 514-990-4470

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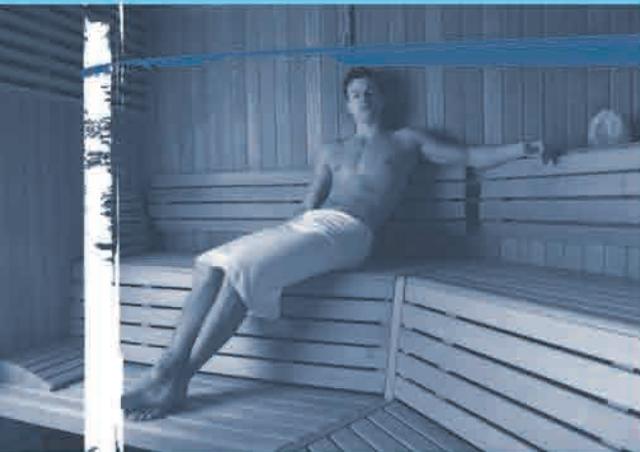
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SAUNAS

You get home after a night out and you're pretty wasted. Let's say that you had a little too much to drink and that a friend offered you a line of coke during the evening... And now, you're feeling pretty horny, you have only one thing on your mind—sex.

So you decide to go to the sauna. You meet a guy who really turns you on. He invites you back to his room, and you accept without hesitation. You start to kiss and caress and suck each other, and sniff a few poppers. He now wants to penetrate you... without a condom..

What do you do?

Right now, sitting here reading these lines, you probably think that you wouldn't go along with it. But reality is sometimes quite different, especially if you have taken drugs or alcohol. You might feel less inhibited because you're into it, you are going with the passion of the moment... So maybe you are less able to set limits.

Other public places and the Internet

Perhaps you go to public places like parks and public bathrooms to meet guys. For some people, having sex in public places is exciting. For others, it may be a source of stress (fear of getting caught, fast sex, etc.). Today, online chat rooms have become a popular way to meet other men, but this is not necessarily as easy as it seems. In fact, you don't know if you and the other person will "click" once you are face to face, you don't know what he likes to do sexually, etc.

Therefore, whether you are meeting someone in a public place or through the Internet, you may take drugs or alcohol to help you relax and make it easier to meet people. As well, drugs and alcohol may make you feel more self-confident and less shy.

The important thing is for you to keep the ability to set limits, for example, by not agreeing to anal penetration without a condom (given or received, top or bottom).

A few things to think about

Do I feel that I always have to drink or do drugs when I meet a guy?
If yes, why?

Why do I feel I have to drink or take drugs when I go out?

Do I always have to drink or take drugs when I go out?

Besides night life, what are the other sources of pleasure in my life
(leisure, relationships, work, etc.)?

What are my goals in life, short term, medium term, and long term?

Am I realistic about the goals I set for myself? How do I see my life in
5, 10, or 20 years?

What are my dreams?



**Why do I drink
or take drugs?**

Just like straight men...

Various situations (which vary from one person to another) can lead you to drink or take drugs, such as:

You are curious about experiencing new sensations;

You want to get rid of boredom, to fill a void, to find something that is missing;

You want to unwind from everyday life; you want to make it easier to interact (the need to socialize);

You are going through a hard time (grieving, break-up, etc.) or, conversely, you are very happy about something and want to celebrate your happiness with the people around you;

You want to be part of the group, to be like the others;

You just want to party.

We all have our reasons for taking drugs or alcohol.

What do drugs and alcohol mean in your life?

Each of these situations can lead to suffering so that drinking or taking drugs can easily become a crutch, a way of running away from your problems.

If you feel that this describes you, and if you want to find out the source of these problems, don't hesitate to ask for the help of a health professional (see the Resources section).

You can also contact the CSSS (what we used to call the CSLC) in your area, or call on community organizations. You'll see, it feels good to talk about it.

...but as a gay or bisexual man

You may be experiencing some special realities. For example:

The fact that homosexuality and bisexuality are not yet fully accepted by society may have left you feeling singled out, labelled, judged;

Your friends and family may have shut you out since you disclosed your sexual orientation, or you may be expecting to be rejected by the people who are close to you;

You may not feel totally comfortable with your sexual orientation;

You may have just found out that you are living with HIV, or you may be having difficulty coping with this reality;

You may be under the impression that you don't meet some of the gay community's esthetic criteria: penis size, weight, etc.

Drugs, alcohol, and their effects

In the gay community, drug and alcohol use and their impact are often trivialized. Recreational drugs are perceived as being “in” and quite harmless. While these substances can bring pleasure, they are not without consequences.

The important thing is to make informed choices. This is why we are presenting, in the pages that follow, the main substances (including alcohol) that are used in a recreational or sexual context in the gay community. We are emphasizing the main effects of these substances over the short, medium, and long term.

The effects are described in a general way and do not automatically apply. You should remember that the effect of a substance depends not only on the substance itself but also on the context and on the psychological and physical characteristics of the person taking the substance.

IN SUMMARY:

Substance

x

Individual

x

Context

=

Effects

Substance

When you take a drug, you never know exactly what you are taking because nothing guarantees its composition.

In 2003, an analysis of 100 ecstasy pills revealed that 44% contained only MDMA (the active substance in ecstasy). As well, 10% of the pills contained no drug, and 8% contained unknown substances. The rest of the pills contained various substances from codeine to methamphetamines.

You should also remember that a drug's effects depend on the dose you take and on the way you take it (for example: cocaine that is sniffed, smoked, or injected).

Individual

Your psychological state can have an impact on the substance you use. For example, you are at risk of having a bad trip if you drink a lot of alcohol when you are going through a hard time.

Your physical state also has an impact on the effect of a substance. For example, the effect would not necessarily be the same when you are tired as when you are in great shape. It is therefore important for you to know your limits. See how you react—the feeling you get when you take the drug, the state you are in when the high is over—and then adjust your use if you need to.

Context

The context in which you take a substance also has an impact on its effect. For example, you are more likely to have a pleasant experience if you take the substance with a close friend or friends rather than alone.