



**HIGHS
AND LOWS**

PARTY & PLAY?

**THE INS AND OUTS
OF CHEMSEX AND
SUBSTANCE USE**

engage
men's health

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What is chemsex?	3
What is harm reduction	4
Harm reduction tips and advice	5
Common chemsex substances	8
Alcohol	8
Cat	9
Cocaine	10
Crystal meth	11
GHB	12
MDMA / Ecstasy	13
Where can I get help?	15
Addiction / substance use support	15
Mental health and suicide support	17
Mental health professionals	18
LGBTQ+ and MSM support	19



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WHAT IS CHEMSEX?

Substance use amongst men who have sex with men (MSM) around the world is believed to be higher than in other groups. This is in part due to the impact of the stigma and discrimination faced by these communities. These factors can also lead to internalised homophobia and an unconscious sense of shame, insecurity and anxiety about same-sex sexuality. Drugs can be a way to cope and manage these feelings.

Chemsex, also known as Party and Play, is when gay, bisexual and other MSM use drugs in their sex lives. These drugs can enhance sexual experiences, lower inhibitions and increase confidence.

Chemsex may last for hours and even days. It can be with multiple sexual partners or between a couple. Some attend or host parties where men use 'chems' and have sex and/or go to venues like saunas or sex clubs. Guys looking for chemsex often use social media, websites or dating/hookup apps to meet other guys.

Chemsex use can start for pleasure, connection, and intimacy. However, it can become difficult to go back to having sex without drugs. It may also lead to risky sexual health behaviours; putting users at higher risk of HIV and other STIs.

WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION?

Chemsex and recreational substance use have traditionally been seen as unacceptable and illegal. People who use drugs have been stigmatised as criminals. Those who want to reduce or manage their use, but not stop completely, have been excluded from programmes that required abstinence.

However, many experts and some governments are starting to take the approach that substance use is a health and not a criminal or a moral issue. There is growing acceptance that all people – regardless of substance use – are entitled to dignity, health care and services. It is also being recognised that forced quitting or abstinence is not always a realistic goal.

The harm reduction approach focuses on reducing the possible harm associated with drug use, rather than only stopping the use of the substance. This has been shown to reduce the risk of overdose and improve the health of users and of the community as a whole.

Harm reduction initiatives can include: providing stigma-free information for the safer use of drugs; managed and moderated use; providing services to users “where they are at”; needle exchanges; safer-sex packs; and linkage to addiction treatment.

HARM REDUCTION TIPS & ADVICE

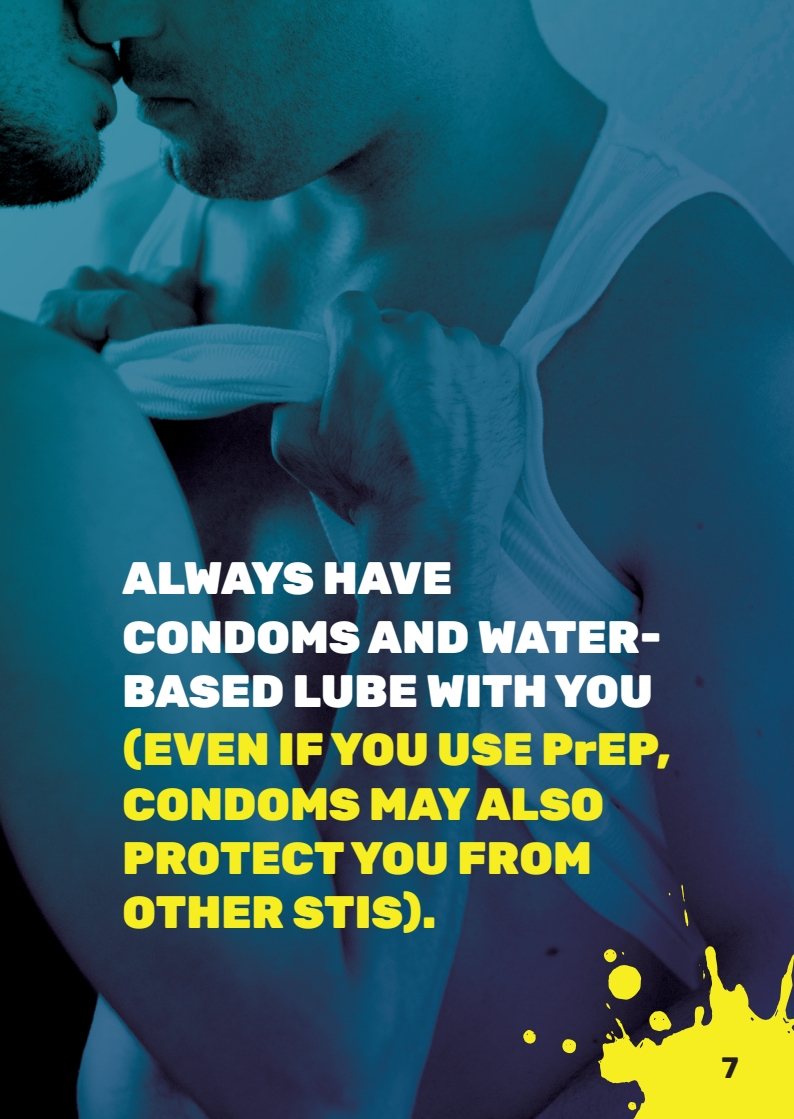
HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU REDUCE THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH DRUG USE AND TO STAY AS HEALTHY AND SAFE AS POSSIBLE.

- Empower yourself with knowledge about the substances you use and the safest way to use them. Don't only rely on others to tell you; do your own research.
- Use drugs in safe environments and with people you trust; avoid placing yourself in danger.
- Be cautious of using alone as there will be no one to help you if you overdose.
- Avoid using multiple substances/drugs at the same time as this could have unpredictable effects and/or increase the risk of overdosing.
- Try to buy less so you're likely to use less.
- Lower your dosage and frequency of use.
- Set a time limit before you start using and try and stick to it.
- Set aside some (or more) days in the week in which you don't use.
- If you are HIV positive, get on and stay on treatment (ART); especially if you bareback.
- If you are HIV negative, get onto PrEP (HIV prevention pill); especially if you bareback.
- Always have condoms and water-based lube with you (even if you use PrEP, condoms may also protect you from other STIs).

HARM REDUCTION TIPS & ADVICE

- If you're HIV negative, not on PrEP and had an unprotected sexual encounter with high-risk HIV exposure, it is important to contact EMH or another healthcare provider within 72 hours to get PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis).
- Always try to use clean equipment - including pipes, straws/notes, spoons and filters - to reduce the spread of infectious diseases.
- If you inject, make sure you have clean needles, tourniquets, cookers and sterile water.
- Never share needles and always inject yourself to avoid overdosing.
- Remember to eat, get sleep and drink water. You may not always feel like doing this, but it is vital to stay healthy and assists with recovery.
- Consider meal replacement drinks or smoothies if a meal seems too daunting.
- If you decide that you need help, don't be afraid to ask. You'll be surprised how much help and support is out there.





**ALWAYS HAVE
CONDOMS AND WATER-
BASED LUBE WITH YOU
(EVEN IF YOU USE PrEP,
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PROTECT YOU FROM
OTHER STIS).**

COMMON CHEMSEX SUBSTANCES

PLEASE NOTE THAT THESE SUMMARIES ARE NOT COMPREHENSIVE AND MAY NOT INCLUDE ALL EFFECTS OR RISKS. USE OF THESE SUBSTANCES CAN LEAD TO PHYSICAL AND/OR PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPENDENCE AND ADDICTION.

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is the ingredient found in beer, wine and spirits that causes drunkenness. It is classed as a depressant, meaning that it slows down vital functions; resulting in slurred speech, unsteady movement, disturbed perceptions, and an inability to react quickly.

What does it do?

- Alcohol reduces a user's ability to think rationally and distorts judgment. This can also lead to a loss of inhibitions.
- Although classified as a depressant, the amount of alcohol consumed determines the type of effect. Most users drink for the stimulant effect, such as a beer or glass of wine to "loosen up." But if a user consumes more than the body can handle, they then experience alcohol's depressant effect. They start to feel "stupid" or lose coordination and control.

- Alcohol overdose causes severe depressant effects, like an inability to feel pain, vomiting, unconsciousness and even coma or death from severe toxic overdose. These reactions depend on how much is consumed and how quickly.
- Long-term abuse of alcohol can lead to heart disease, stroke, liver disease and cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, voice box, liver, colon and rectum.

CAT

Cat consists of methcathinone (also known as mephedrone), a psychoactive substance. It is one of the most used drugs in South Africa. In South Africa, Cat is not from the Khat plant but is mainly produced in homemade labs to create a cheap but potent drug. Cat is usually snorted with a straw or a banknote.

What does it do?

- Cat makes users feel alert, confident and elated.
- The user becomes talkative with an increase in empathy.
- It suppresses appetite.
- Leads to periods of insomnia and sleep deprivation.
- Shaking of the limbs.
- Increased heart rate, blood pressure, risk of stroke or heart attack.
- It leads both to decreased and increased sexual function and desire (horniness).
- The more the user uses the more it causes anxiety and agitation.
- It can lead to paranoia and dependence.

COCAINE

Powder, C, charlie, coke, dust, lady, snow, white, Chanel, 'a line'

Cocaine is a white powder that is often made into short lines and then sniffed through a rolled-up piece of paper or straw. The effects wear off quite quickly so heavy users can get through several grams in a short time. Cocaine is sometimes wrapped in paper and swallowed (bombing). Some users mix it with marijuana and smoke it. It can also be used to make "crack" which can be smoked. It may be turned into a liquid and injected, which is the riskiest way to take the drug.

What does it do?

- Cocaine makes users feel alert, energetic and confident. It also makes the user feel horny.
- Can cause dry mouth, sweating, loss of appetite and increased heart and pulse rate.
- At higher doses, users may feel anxious, panicky and paranoid.
- Excessive doses can cause death from respiratory or heart failure.
- After-effects of cocaine include fatigue and depression.
- Using cocaine with alcohol can be risky as they combine in the body to produce a substance called cocaethylene which allows the user to drink more without getting drunk. This puts extra stress on the heart and liver with potentially serious consequences.
- Users who inject the drug are at risk of infection from HIV, hepatitis C and hepatitis B if they share needles and other injecting paraphernalia.

CRYSTAL METH

Tik, tina, crystal, xtina, meth, glass

Crystal meth (methamphetamine) comes in powder or crystal form. It has a similar effect to cocaine or cat but a much longer high. People may smoke it on foil or a small pipe, swallow it in capsule form, snort it with a note or straw and some inject it intravenously; known as 'slamming'. Globally, methamphetamine is the second most used recreational drug, after marijuana.

What does it do?

- Crystal meth makes users feel alert, energetic, confident and powerful.
- Makes users feel very horny.
- They may become anxious and confused, be unable to sleep, and have extreme mood swings.
- Other side effects may include paranoia, nausea, panic attacks, compulsive repetitive behaviour and jaw clenching.
- Users may become paranoid and hear and see things that aren't there. They may think about hurting themselves or others. This known as methamphetamine psychosis.
- Withdrawal symptoms can be severe and include depression, anxiety and an intense craving to reuse.
- Users who inject the drug are at risk of infection from HIV, hepatitis C and hepatitis B if they share needles and other injecting paraphernalia.

GHB/GBL

GHB is an anaesthetic with sedating properties. It usually comes in small bottles or capsules. It is often called 'liquid ecstasy', although it has no relationship to ecstasy. It is an odourless, oily liquid that looks like water and has a slightly salty taste. GBL is closely related to GHB (although it is often sold as GHB or G) and has similar effects. GBL smells more like paint thinners. Users usually swallow GHB or GBL mixed with water or other soft drinks.

What does it do?

- Produces a mild high in smaller doses and sedation in higher doses.
- Users feel euphoric, with a loss of inhibitions, increased confidence and higher libido. (It can be very similar to being drunk on alcohol.)
- It is very easy to overdose, both because the strength can vary from bottle to bottle and the difference between a recreational dose and overdose may only be a matter of millilitres.
- Overdosing on GHB/GBL can be deadly. Nausea and vomiting, seizures, convulsions, disorientation and stiffening of muscles may occur, and coma and respiratory collapse may follow.
- Combining alcohol or Viagra with GHB can be fatal.
- Withdrawal symptoms may include delirium, psychosis, tremors, insomnia and severe anxiety.

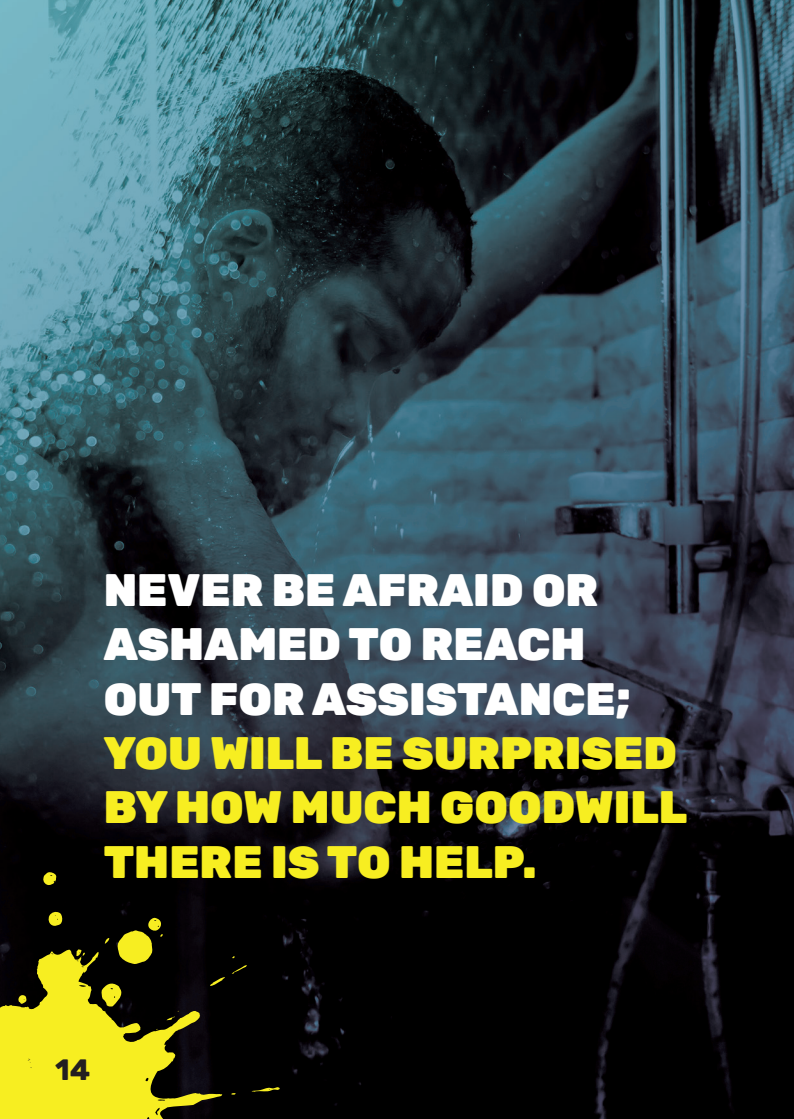
MDMA

Ecstasy, E, molly, disco biscuit, X

MDMA is a synthetic drug that alters mood and perception. MDMA is a white or off-white powder or crystals and sold in capsules or little bags. Ecstasy is in a pill form and often has a symbol or picture on it. Anything sold as “molly” or “ecstasy” could include other drugs or even contain no MDMA at all. You can never be sure what is actually in an ecstasy pill.

What does it do?

- The effects of MDMA include an enhanced sense of well-being, extroversion, emotional warmth, empathy toward others and a desire to discuss emotionally charged memories.
- There may be enhanced sensory perception, like feeling music in a heightened manner.
- MDMA increases heart rate and blood pressure, which is risky for people with heart and blood vessel problems.
- Other effects may include nausea, muscle cramping, involuntary teeth clenching, blurred vision, chills, sweating, high blood pressure, panic attacks, loss of consciousness, and seizures.
- It can cause fatal overheating when dancing as it interferes with the body's ability to regulate temperature.



**NEVER BE AFRAID OR
ASHAMED TO REACH
OUT FOR ASSISTANCE;
YOU WILL BE SURPRISED
BY HOW MUCH GOODWILL
THERE IS TO HELP.**

WHERE CAN I GET HELP OR SUPPORT?

ADDICTION / SUBSTANCE USE & SUPPORT

Alcoholics Anonymous

Alcoholics Anonymous is an international fellowship of men and women who have had a drinking problem. Membership is open to anyone who wants to do something about his or her drinking problem. SA national helpline: 0861 HELPAA (435 722)

Visit www.aasouthafrica.org.za for contact numbers and meeting rooms

Cocaine Anonymous South Africa

Cocaine Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others recover from their addiction. Helpline: 063 268 8794

Visit www.ca.org.za/casa

Narcotics Anonymous

Narcotics Anonymous is a free, non-profit fellowship of people for whom drugs have become a major problem. NA's program is open to addicts who have a desire to stop using.

Call: 011 509 0031 / 083 900 6962 | Visit: www.na.org.za

Al-Anon Family Groups

Al-Anon Family Groups is for the families and friends of problem drinkers, with a special section, Alateen, for children of alcoholics, and a group for adult children of alcoholics. Call: 0861 252 666 | Visit: www.alanon.org.za

Nar-Anon Family Groups

The Nar-Anon Family Groups is for those who know or have known a feeling of desperation concerning the addiction problem of someone very near to them. Visit: www.nar-anon.org.za

SANCA (National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence)

Sanca provides specialised and affordable prevention and treatment services for alcohol and other drug dependence. Head office: 011 892 3829 | WhatsApp 076 535 170 email: sancanational@telkomsa.net. For details of Sanca facilities around the country, visit: www.sancanational.info/contact

Sex & Love Addiction

For general information contact either of the following: Male contact number: 082 565 6212 | Female contact number: 081 437 5798. Email: info@slaasa.co.za | Visit: www.slaasa.co.za

Sexaholics Anonymous South Africa

Email: recoveryinsa@gmail.com
Visit: www.sa.org/f2f/south-africa/

Department of Social Development

Substance Abuse 24hr helpline. Call: 0800 12 13 14 or SMS 32312

MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE SUPPORT

SADAG (The South African Depression and Anxiety Group)

SADAG is Africa's largest mental health support and advocacy group. The SADAG Mental Health Line is 011 234 4837. Dr Reddy's Help Line is 0800 21 22 23 and the Cipla 24hr Mental Health Helpline is 0800 456 789. For Suicide support, call the Suicide Crisis Line: 0800 567 567. You can also contact the Cipla WhatsApp Chat Line (9am-4pm, 7 days a week) on 076 882 2775. Visit: www.sadag.org

LifeLine

LifeLine provides free counselling and connects with people, giving them the tools they need to better handle stress and improve their emotional health. Call their toll free line 24hrs/7days a week for more information and counselling: 0861 322 322 | Visit: www.lifeline.co.za

Gender-based Violence Line

The 24-hour hotline offers counselling for those who have been physically, emotionally, sexually or financially abused. Call: 0800 012 322

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

These mental health professionals are gay, bi and MSM-affirming and are sensitised about chemsex and harm reduction.

Cornelius (Niel) J Victor: Clinical and research psychologist in Cape Town. Visit: www.victorpsychology.co.za

David Collins – The Foundation Clinic: Offers treatment options and recovery training/coaching in Johannesburg. Visit: www.thefoundationclinic.com or www.uact.org.za

Prof Juan A. Nel (D Litt et Phil): Registered clinical and research psychologist. LGBT-affirmative practitioner with private practice in Muckleneuk, Pretoria. Also available for online consultations (Zoom/WA video call).
Email: juan4nel@gmail.com

Malan van der Walt: Educational psychologist and therapist in Parktown North, Johannesburg.
Email: malan.psychologist@gmail.com

Rob Hamilton: Clinical psychologist who works with addiction and harm reduction in Johannesburg.
Visit: www.robhamiltononline.com

LGBTQ+ AND MSM SUPPORT

Engage Men's Health

Engage Men's Health provides free HIV, STI and other sexual and mental health services (including PrEP, PEP and ART) to gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) in Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela Bay and Buffalo City.

Call or WhatsApp: 082 607 1686

Visit: www.engagemenshealth.org.za

OUT LGBT Well-being

Provides a free legal clinic for LGBTQ+ individuals affected by discrimination and hate crimes.

Call: 012 430 3272

Email: report@out.org.za

Queerwell

A safe space for the LGBTQ+ community to engage and receive support in Johannesburg. Call: 068 022 4581

Visit: www.queerwell.org

Triangle Project

Call: 021 422 0255

Uthingo Network Psychosocial Support

033 342 6165 / 079 891 3036

engage

men's health

WWW.ENGAGEMENTSHEALTH.ORG.ZA

Call / WhatsApp: 082 607 1686

