

Physical Concerns – *Recreational Drug/Substance Use*

Internet version of this handout with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/drugs>

What is substance use?

Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of *psychoactive substances*, including alcohol, illicit drugs, and tobacco. Examples include taking more over-the-counter or prescription medications than prescribed, like opioid pain relievers, in addition to substances such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and tobacco products. Someone might be considered dependent on a substance when he/she continues using it despite harmful consequences of develops increased tolerance for or withdrawal symptoms from the substance.

What are the risks of substance use?

Most people know that substance use can cause health and other drug-related problems. But many people might not know that using drugs can also raise their risk of developing cancer, worsen symptoms of cancer, or interact with cancer treatments to cause harmful side effects.

Can I use drugs during treatment?

It's important for you to speak to your health care team about whether or not it is safe for you to use any legal or illicit substances during or immediately following treatment. The doctors and nurses administering treatment will be able to give specific advice about whether using various substances is safe with particular drugs.

Where can I get help with my recreational drug use?

Substances are frequently used as a coping strategy during times of stress, like managing a cancer diagnosis and treatment. However, there are a number of treatments available to support recovery from drug use disorders and/or to help you adopt and maintain healthy coping strategies and lifestyle behaviors. If you believe you need support, talk to your care team. Your doctors and nurses can help you to navigate options. A team social worker may be a particularly good resource for you.

To talk with someone at anytime:

SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Free and confidential information in English and Spanish for individuals and family members facing substance abuse and mental health issues. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Resources for Additional Information:

- [Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Drug Abuse and Cancer: What You Should Know](#)