



## Multiple Substance Use

AUG 2023

**LENGTH** 8–10 minutes

**TO PREPARE** Read the background information.

### BACKGROUND

- According to the Centers for Disease Control, the use of more than one drug, also known as **multiple substance use**, is common. This includes when two or more substances are taken together or within a short time period, either intentionally or unintentionally.
- **Intentional multiple substance use** occurs when a person takes a drug to increase or decrease the effects of a different drug or wants to experience the effects of the combination.
- **Unintentional multiple substance use** occurs when a person takes drugs that have been mixed or cut with other substances, like fentanyl, without their knowledge.
- According to the Alcohol and Drug Foundation, multiple substance use can affect everyone differently.
  - <https://adf.org.au/reducing-risk/polydrug-use>

### DISCUSSION

- Whether intentional or not, mixing substances is generally not advised unless a doctor prescribes multiple drugs to assist a sick patient or one in recovery.
- The effects from combining drugs may be stronger or more unpredictable than one drug used alone—and can even be deadly.
- The dangers of multiple substance use also apply to prescription drugs. Always let your doctor know what drugs you are taking to prevent any adverse reactions with newly prescribed medications.
- The U.S. Food & Drug Administration recommends following directions and reading warnings on medication packaging.
- Store substances in a locked cabinet or in a location children cannot get to.



### What combinations are considered multiple substances?

- An illegal drug and a legal drug
- A pair of prescription drugs
- A prescription drug and an illegal drug
- Alcohol and any drug
- A pair of over-the-counter drugs



*Answer: All of these pairs can be considered multiple substances and require caution.*



## Should I check combinations of over-the-counter medicines?

- Over-the-counter medicines are presumed safe by most people, but should be checked for interactions.
- The **Interactions Check** at [drugs.com](https://www.drugs.com) is a resource for revealing interactions of two or more drugs.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration advises you to always take medicines as directed. It may not be safe to drive while taking some medications or a combination of medications.

## OPTIONAL DISCUSSION

### Can you recognize the signs of an opioid overdose?

- No response to stimulation
- Lack of, slowed or infrequent breathing
- Deep snoring or gurgling
- Heavy, limp limbs
- Clammy, pale or ashen skin
- Slow, weak pulse

### What to do if you think someone is overdosing:

- Call 911 immediately.
- Administer Naloxone (such as Narcan®), if available.
- Try to keep the person awake and breathing.
- Lay the person on his or her side to prevent choking.
- Stay with the person until emergency workers arrive.

According to the CDC, it may be hard to tell whether a person is high or experiencing an overdose. If you aren't sure, it's best to treat the situation like an overdose—you could save a life.

## SUMMARY

- Knowing whether multiple substance use will produce adverse reactions can help prevent workplace and driving incidents.
- Always follow directions for use of prescription drugs and over-the-counter medication.
- View this one-minute multiple substance use safety video from Our Driving Concern Texas Employer Traffic Safety program:
  - **LINK:** <https://youtu.be/23ChRIUjobOM>