

# Recognizing Opioid Overdose

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell if a person is just very high, or experiencing an overdose. The following will present some information on how to tell the difference. If you're having a hard time telling the difference, it is best to treat the situation like an overdose – it could save someone's life.

If someone is really high and using downers like heroin, or pills:

- Pupils will contract and appear small
- Muscles are slack and droopy
- They might “nod out”
- Scratch a lot due to itchy skin
- Speech may be slurred

They might be out of it, but they will respond to outside stimulus like loud noise or a light shake from a concerned friend.

If you are worried that someone is getting too high, it is important that you don't leave them alone. If the person is still conscious, walk them around, keep them awake, and monitor their breathing.

The following are signs of an overdose:

- Loss of consciousness
- Unresponsive to outside stimulus
- Awake, but unable to talk
- Breathing is very slow and shallow, erratic, or has stopped
- For lighter skinned people, the skin tone turns bluish purple, for darker skinned people, it turns grayish or ashen.
- Choking sounds, or a snore-like gurgling noise
- Vomiting
- Body is very limp
- Face is very pale or clammy
- Fingernails and lips turn blue or purplish black
- Pulse (heartbeat) is slow, erratic, or not there at all

Know the Signs of Overdose

**Save a Life**

**Call 9-1-1**

If someone is making unfamiliar sounds while “sleeping” it is worth trying to wake him or her up. Many loved ones of users think a person was snoring, when in fact the person was overdosing. These situations are a missed opportunity to intervene and save a life.

It is rare for someone to die immediately from an overdose. When people survive, it's because someone was there to respond.

*The most important thing is  
to act right away!*

Source: Harm Reduction Coalition, Albany, NY

