

in brief

Street drugs

by Dr. Benoit Trottier

Mixing antiretrovirals and street drugs can lead to serious complications and adverse effects. Some of them interact badly with antiretrovirals (ARVs). Others can make it more difficult to take your meds. If you're going to use street drugs, here are some ways to minimize complications.

Alcohol

Although alcohol doesn't directly interact with ARVs, consuming large quantities can lead to non-adherence (forgetting doses of your meds) and use of certain meds (like Videx®) can increase your risk of pancreatitis or liver damage. High alcohol intake can also cause liver damage, which is of special concern if you've got hepatitis B or C. Mixing alcohol with other drugs like GHB, benzos, Special K and opiates is extremely dangerous and should be avoided because there's an additive effect of sedation, decreased reflexes and possible respiratory depression.



effect as a full dose. Taking them together increases your risk of accidental death and serious complications, so it's best avoided altogether.

Viracept® and Rescriptor® can also increase amphetamine levels, so a smaller dose of stimulant will produce a greater effect.

Crystal meth can seriously decrease inhibitions and increase your libido, so if you're taking crystal and having sex, be sure to protect yourself, as you **can** be re-infected with a different, (potentially drug-resistant) strain of HIV.

Ecstasy

The long-term effects of MDMA (ecstasy, E, X, XTC) on the brain are not well understood yet, but it's well known that taking E with Norvir®, Kaletra® or Rescriptor® can lead to a 3–10 fold increase in the effects of E. So, if you're on these ARVs, 1/4 or 1/2 a tablet of E will be even more powerful than a whole tablet in someone not on these ARVs. If you're taking Viracept®, start with a smaller dose of E and if Crixivan® is part of your regimen, drink lots of water to avoid kidney stones.

Coming down

There are still many unknowns when it comes to street drugs and ARVs. If you decide to mix them, please do it carefully. Don't be shy about telling your doctor and pharmacist about the recreational drugs you take, even if it's not often. Also, never miss a dose of your ARVs, even if you're high, as this could be even more dangerous than mixing. **R**

GHB

GHB, or gamma-hydroxy-butyrate, is a powerful euphoric drug and it's one of the easiest street drugs to overdose on. If taken in large quantities, GHB can lead to coma and seizures. GHB should not be taken with any ARV regimen that includes ritonavir (Norvir®, Kaletra®). Rescriptor® and Viracept® can also interact with GHB, increasing its toxicity.

Special K

Ketamine, also known as Special K, Ket and Vitamin K, is an anesthetic that's recently become very popular at after-hours clubs and raves. Norvir®, Kaletra® and Viracept® can all increase the potency of K, potentially resulting in dangerous effects. Sustiva® can increase or decrease the effects of K, and K potentially increases levels of Sustiva® resulting in more side effects. Viramune® can decrease the effects of K.

Stimulants: crystal meth and speed

Although the initial effects of stimulants are hyper alertness and euphoria, long-term use can lead to immunosuppression, fatigue, nervousness, psychosis and poor appetite. It can also decrease adherence with your meds.

If your drug regimen includes Norvir® or Kaletra®, 1/4 or 1/2 a dose of amphetamines has the same



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Party safe

Even though you shouldn't use street drugs with ARVs, follow these suggestions to limit negative effects:

- Choose the right drug and drug dealer
- Take small doses
- Rest and eat well before and after you party

- Avoid being excessive (multiple doses over the night)
- Avoid excessive heat and dehydration
- Stay with your friends
- Tell your friends what you're on (party drugs and HIV meds)
- Don't drive
- Have safe sex