



Do you have feedback about this booklet?

Do you have artwork, poetry, or writing that you would like to send us to use in future harm reduction booklets?

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**TAKING
CARE ...**

OF OURSELVES & THOSE WE CARE ABOUT



HARM REDUCTION
**RECREATIONAL USE OF
WELLBUTRIN**

PASAN can't make these booklets alone.

It is only with the knowledge and expertise of those with lived and living experiences, both inside and outside of prison walls, that we can put together this information to share with others. Most importantly, to share with prisoners.

We welcome that this booklet may be shared within different institutions as well as outside of prison walls, and we hope that you find something useful from it no matter where you are. It's also important to know that how this information is put together is meant for prisoners, especially those in federal institutions.

Because what harm reduction looks like on the outside is not the same as what harm reduction can look like on the inside – where the exact resources and supports we need are not always available when and how we need them.

We want to give sincere thanks to all of the participants who shared their knowledge, their experiences, and their ideas with us to inform this booklet.

Your ongoing support and guidance helps PASAN continue to make resources that are relevant and important for prisoners inside.



PASAN believes
HARM REDUCTION MEANS that –

Everyone is deserving of health, connection, and well-being. So...

We remove our judgement and work to minimize harmful effects of actions rather than simply ignore or condemn them.

Remember our medicines are all different and what works for one does not work for all.

We are complex, multi-faceted people that will not share the same goals– or have the same needs – the best expert is the self. Our healing is unique to our experience and who we are, it cannot be done without our whole selves involved.

We focus on what's possible and not on what's out of our control.
That means what's possible in my situation, environment, relationships, etc.

We acknowledge that there are systemic and institutional factors that take away choice and cause harm in people's lives, relationships, communities. We work to bring choice and self-direction back into focus.

All things are connected, we work from their intersections– a whole person approach to a whole person problem.

The who, what, why, where, when is important– the best results come from when the people who are impacted are involved in the solution. With listening and consultation, we find the right directions.

We believe that there is a better, more compassionate, kind and effective way to practice justice in our communities. Our current system punishes and isolates, harm reduction finds common ground and restores relationships.



WHAT COMMUNITY IS SAYING:

"don't shake and bake it! use a clean cup, small bowl or bottle cap even with clean water – and a filter!"

"if you're using cotton to filter, wet the cotton first before you put it in your liquid. you get less particles."

"I used cigarette filters when I had them, clean and unsmoked ones. I liked them better than using paper or cotton."

"I keep my own rig. I use the bleach that medical gives out and I clean it and then rinse it with water 10 times after each use."

"sometimes I give my veins a break and will do a muscle shot or hoop-it instead."

We understand that there is very limited access to gear on the inside. It's important to still try and use new materials each time we use, and to not share the materials we do have access to.

Feel free to call us at PASAN to talk more about this (CAN wide)

You can also request that we add your name for a one-to-one visit if we're able to visit your institution (ONT only)

Are you currently in a federal institution within Canada and ...

Is there a needle exchange program or overdose prevention site in your institution? Do you have questions about it?

Do you have feedback about the gaps between the health and harm reduction information we are sharing and how it really is on the inside?

Want to tell us what resources would you like to see more of?

You can write to us or call us about this too.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?



Because rates of HIV and

Hepatitis-C (Hep-C) are higher inside prisons, where access to adequate equipment and supplies is low or often not available at all.

This booklet is meant to share some harm-reduction practices for recreational substance use, because knowing how our substances of choice affect us and how to consume them more safely can reduce our chances of HIV and Hep-C, and is good for taking care of our overall health and well-being.

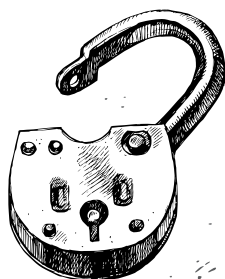
But this booklet is only a small collection of information, so please ask for and check out additional resources for more information and further knowledge on safer practices.

The Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) has some great booklets, such as: *Sharp Shooters: Harm Reduction Info for Safer Injection Drug Use* and *Safer Snorting*, or PASAN's *Staying Healthy Behind the Walls: Hepatitis C and HIV in Prison*, plus many others.

Some of the instructions or tips for safer practices in many of the different resources may not be available or possible for folks on the inside. These resources are still important though, because they share a lot of information that is still very helpful, and maybe even life saving.

Another super important resource are the allies and trusted people around you. Check in with the person or people you trust, ask them questions, brainstorm with them – what works and what doesn't, what's safe or not, what does access look like, etc. – and look after each other.

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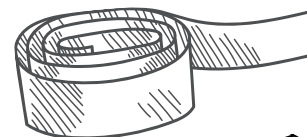
SOME SAFER SNORTING PRACTICES ARE:

- Don't share equipment – or keep your own straw/tube/etc. to use each time
- Always rinse out your straw/tube multiple times with water after each use to avoid any buildup
- If no equipment, bump off the back of your clean hand
- Wash your hands and any surfaces you plan to use
- Crush substances into as fine a powder as possible
- Rinse nostrils with small amount of water or saline solution (salt water) before snorting
- Cover opposite nostril, aim straw toward middle of nose/septum and inhale slowly (to avoid inhaling substance into sinuses)
- Switch back and forth between nostrils when snorting
- When doing larger doses, do multiple smaller lines / bumps, rather than one or two big ones
- Rinse nostrils with small amount of water or saline solution

SAFER INJECTING

Injecting Welly has been known to be kind of rough on the body – it can cause damage at the injection site including tissue damage, skin abscesses, collapsed veins, and clogged arteries. It's important to take extra care when injecting bupropion.

- New equipment and supplies every time is always safest
- If you can't use new, keep your own equipment and supplies for yourself to re-use again
- When re-using, flush needle and syringe several times with clean, cold or room-temperature water after each use so it doesn't become clogged with blood or other matter
- Safest body part for injections is our arms (above wrist to below the shoulder)
- Clean injection site thoroughly and apply warmth to site after injection to avoid abscesses forming
- Rotate your injection sites to give them time to heal
- Avoid injecting into veins that are tender, or hardened, or inflamed





SAFER USE 101

Hepatitis-C is a virus that is passed from person to person only through blood. **HIV** is a virus that is spread through blood, through sexual fluids (*no, not saliva – vaginal, penile, and anal sexual fluids*), and can be passed from parent to child through breast feeding.

In the prison environment, sharing equipment is one of the easiest ways to spread active blood-borne viruses and other infections.

Safer-use and harm reduction practices are not only meant to help prevent the spread of these viruses, but also to prevent instances of drug toxicity and overdose.

THE SUPER BASICS

- Don't use alone
- Wash your hands before using
- Sharing is NOT caring – never share your equipment!
- Start low, go slow – try to use a small test dose first
- Avoid mixing substances
- Know what to do in case of drug toxicity & overdose

SAFER SNORTING

When snorting, our substance of choice is absorbed through our nasal membranes. Because Welly is not made for this, we risk more damage to the inner lining of our nasal passages, which increases our risk for different bacteria and viruses to enter our body. This damage can also cause the tiniest amounts of blood to seep out – that blood gets on whatever equipment we are using (straw, tube, paper, etc.).

These tiny amounts of blood leave us at higher risk for the Hep-C virus. And we know that Hep-C is a virus that can be passed through little drops of blood that are so small we could never see them. Because of this, sharing equipment with others is a super easy way for Hep-C to spread from person to person.

WHAT'S RECREATIONAL DRUG USE?

This booklet is going to focus specifically on **RECREATIONAL PRESCRIPTION DRUG USE**.

Recreational drug use is when we use a drug that has been prescribed by a doctor in order to feel their effects, but for non medical reasons.

It could be our own prescription that maybe we take an extra of so that we feel the effects differently. Or it could be someone else's prescription of a drug that our body isn't as used to taking, or maybe isn't used to at all.

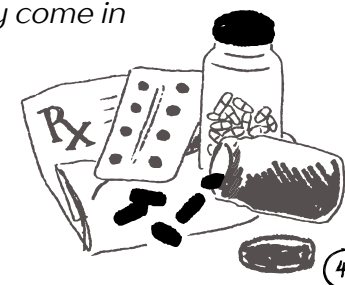
Those non medical effects from the drug could feel like a brief escape from our current reality and situation, it could be to numb ourselves, it could be for our own enjoyment because the effects feel good.

There are many different reasons why we might use prescription drugs for non medical reasons.

"But I don't do that stuff."

That's okay. This information is for everyone. You never know when this knowledge may come in handy and be helpful.

So whether for yourself, for those you care about, or just because – read on!



RECREATIONAL USE OF: WELLBUTRIN (BUPROPION)

Wellbutrin (Welly or Wellies) is commonly prescribed as an anti-depressant and as an aid to stop smoking tobacco. Less commonly for anxiety, bipolar disorder, ADHD, and other uses.

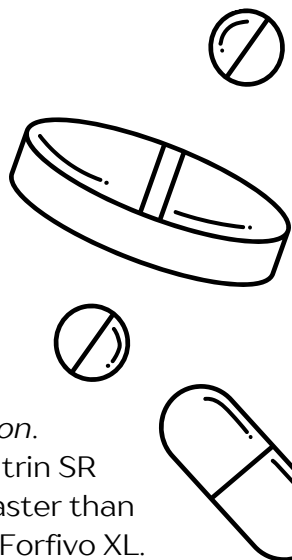
Its active ingredient (and generic name) is *Bupropion*. Wellbutrin XL means *extended-release* and Wellbutrin SR means *sustained-release* (SR releases just a little faster than XL). Other brand names used are: Zyban, Aplenzin, Forfivo XL.

Those using Wellbutrin for non medical reasons often use it because it can create a feeling of euphoria (an intense state of excitement or happiness). Some people have said it has a similar feeling as cocaine. It is commonly taken orally, snorted, or injected.

It's difficult to say what the safest dose is for taking Wellbutrin. We have to think about how much our body can handle, how much do we weigh, are we taking any other drugs that might mix badly with it or do we have any other health factors that are relevant? Also, have we eaten and are we hydrated enough? Plus many other things to take into account.

Talk to others about dosing!

How do they do it? What do they consider and factor in? What are their practices? etc.



WHAT ABOUT ANTIVIRALS FOR HEP-C?

Same goes for Hep-C treatment, mostly. There have been a couple of studies that suggest the drugs *Ribavirin* and *Mavyret* might have some interactions with Welly. Ribavirin could increase the bupropion in our system, leading to increased side effects for some people. And one medical study suggests that taking Mavyret and Wellbutrin together could lead to more manic behaviour like being easier to anger, and more agitation and frustration.

No other serious interactions have been found for other available Hep-C antivirals.



Honestly, Wellbutrin has a long list of drugs that have possible interactions – including other anti-depressants, antipsychotics, beta-blockers, stimulants such as other ADHD medications, and more.

Most of these interactions name a higher risk for seizures, heightened side effects, or impacting how effect one of the drugs is (either the bupropion or whatever other drug it interacts with).

It's important to remember that there are many different factors for each and every one of us that impact how a drug or its side effects might impact us. All the more reason to make sure we're practicing safer-use and harm reduction practices!

MANAGING THE COME DOWN...



- stay hydrated and eat regularly
(dehydration and low blood sugar can increase seizure risk and can make dizziness and confusion worse)
- limit caffeine intake – this can help to lessen jitters & anxiety

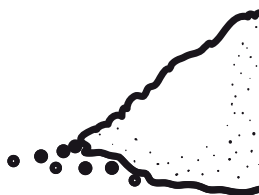
"sugar packets!"

"quiet space.
deep
breaths."

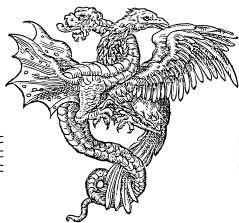
"yeah!
or juice crystals. or
sugar water."

"just eating in
general really
helped for me."

- salted water can help with hydration
($\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of salt to 1 litre of water – so really, just a small pinch!)



MEDICATION



INTERACTIONS

Mixing Wellbutrin with downers (alcohol, benzos, opioids, etc.) which slows down our central nervous system (*heart rate, breathing, consciousness, etc.*) can increase our risk of seizures / overdose and other side effects.

WHAT ABOUT METHADONE?

This includes Methadone. Wellbutrin blocks one of the pathways that methadone is processed by. So if we're taking Welly often or if there are spikes of large doses, the levels of methadone in our system can increase, which can slow down our central nervous system even more. And then if we stop taking Welly, or are coming down from a big dose of it, our methadone levels can drop and we can experience opioid withdrawal symptoms.

AND SUBOXONE?

Suboxone and Wellbutrin don't have the same interaction, but can still increase our risk of seizure and side effects.

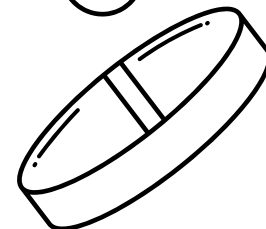
COLD TURKEY?

All the same goes for if we suddenly STOP consuming alcohol and/or drugs like benzos, barbiturates, anti-seizure meds, etc. Because seizures can sometimes be part of the withdrawal symptoms and Wellbutrin can increase our risk of seizures and make the symptoms worse.

WHAT IF I TAKE ANTIVIRALS FOR HIV?

No serious drug interactions have been found between bupropion and antivirals. Some studies say that antiviral meds may make the Wellbutrin less effective. Very few studies say that the Wellbutrin may make a few antivirals less effective. Most say that Welly and antivirals are pretty safe to take together, but it's still important to closely monitor our viral load, our meds, and our health.

WHAT COMMUNITY IS SAYING:



"I definitely smoked less crack and crystal meth when I was snorting Welly."

"It made me feel super tweaky, for sure kind of paranoid too. But that might have also been the prison environment, you know? There's a lot going on at The South."

"It burned when I injected, got bad abscesses too. The high felt similar to cocaine, lasted longer than a hit of crack or coke does though. I felt really shaky, like I had tremors, especially on the come down. Really bad dry mouth too. Come down didn't feel as bad as coke does."

"It felt like a stimulant, but more sketchy."

"The Welly I had was purple, you gotta' wash off the dye first before you crush it. otherwise it burns even worse than normal. Or sometimes it's this thin plastic coating, but you can peel it off."

"I smoked a lot less [cigarettes] when I was taking Welly [orally and snorting]. I'm almost full quit now!"

"I felt pretty calm when I took it orally. Come up didn't feel too overwhelming, pretty hard crash though, lots of dry mouth and some anxiety."

POTENTIAL WELLY SIDE EFFECTS

[This booklet does not include every single side effect or symptom]

Anyone taking Wellbutrin on a prescribed daily basis may experience some side effects. If taken daily and then suddenly stopped then we might experience some bupropion withdrawal as our bodies and brains adjust.

If we're using it more recreationally, especially often or at higher doses, our come down might include some *bupropion withdrawal* like symptoms.

This could look like:

- * Headaches
- * Fatigue
- * Dizziness
- * Brain fog
- * Memory issues
- * Gut issues (nausea, vomiting, etc.)
- * Trouble sleeping or sleeping way too much
- * Feeling extra irritable and more emotionally sensitivity



Withdrawal symptoms and side effects can be different for different people. It might depend on our drug tolerance or sensitivities, other medications we take or health conditions we have, etc. and can range from very mild to severe. And some people don't experience side effects at all (*lucky!*).

SIGNS OF AN OVERDOSE

The hallmark sign of bupropion toxicity is **seizures**.

Wellbutrin can make it easier for our body to experience seizures. If you're already prone to seizures, it is important to be extra careful.

- If taken orally, a seizure can happen up to 24 hours after dosing
- If snorting, a seizure can happen within a few hours of dosing

One medical study followed 67 different people who snorted bupropion over 11 years and found that 30% of the people had seizures within 8 hours after snorting anywhere from 30-1500mg – that's about 20 people out of the 67 people who had a seizure after snorting Welly.

SIGNS OF AN OVERDOSE CON'T

A Welly induced seizure will happen faster when snorted vs. when taken orally because when we crush it up, the substance that makes it release slower inside our body gets destroyed – so it has nothing telling it to slow down.

There is not a lot of research on injecting Welly.

But we also know that injecting speeds up any drug's effect on our body, so we need to remember to *start low and go slow!*

Some other signs to keep an eye on include:

- * Agitation (severe restlessness)
- * Body tremors (shakes)
- * Increased heart rate
- * Mania and/or hallucinations

WHAT DO TO IF SOMEONE STARTS TO HAVE A SEIZURE:

Stay calm, stay with them

Start timing the seizure if you can

Do not try to hold them down or restrict their movements

Do not force anything into their mouth

If you can gently turn them onto their side, do that (*this helps prevent choking*)

Clear the area around them so that they do not hurt themselves

Place something soft under their head if possible

Do not try to give them any liquid or food until they are fully-fully awake



If their seizure lasts for longer than 5 minutes or if they don't wake up at all after the seizure, you need to get medical help right away