What is Drug Overdose? A drug overdose is the accidental or intentional intake of any drug in dosage higher than the prescribed quantity. Almost any drug taken in excess can cause a person to suffer the effects of an overdose. Some prescribed medicines and recreational drugs taken in excess or without medical supervision can prove fatal unless prompt care is available.

Symptoms of a drug overdose can include:
- Shallow, labored, or irregular breathing, or no breathing
- Gurgling sounds that indicate the person's airway is blocked
- Confusion, disorientation, or hallucination
- Loss of coordination or motor control
- Increased or decreased blood pressure
- Rapid or slow heartbeat rate
- Headache
- Drowsiness or collapse
- Loss of consciousness
- Clammy, pale skin
- Blue lips or fingers
- Overheated skin
- Mood changes, including aggression, agitation, anxiety, or depression
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Abnormal pupil size or pupils that don't change size when light is shined into them
- Abdominal pain
- Ringing in the ears
- Vision abnormalities such as blurred vision or vision loss
- Seizures
- Unresponsiveness, unconsciousness, or coma

A person may not exhibit all or even most of these signs, but even a few of these symptoms can indicate an overdose.

Preventing Drug Overdose
- Always read medication labels carefully and take prescription medications only as directed. Keep all medications in their original packaging.
- Avoid drugs of any kind unless advised by a doctor.
- Always inform your doctor or other health professional of a previous overdose. Be cautious when taking different drugs or substances (including alcohol) at or around the same time as they can interact negatively and increase the risk of overdose.

Harm Reduction The best way to avoid overdose from illegal drugs is not to use them. If you do use, take precautions including:
- If you haven't used illicit drugs such as heroin for a while, be aware that your tolerance is likely to be much lower than it was before – use a smaller amount. Overestimating your tolerance can be fatal.
- If using illegal drugs from an unknown source or of unknown purity, have a smaller amount at first.
- Try to avoid using alone – let someone know where you are and what you are doing or have a friend with you.

What to Do
Call 911
- Seek immediate medical attention, even if the person seems not to be experiencing overdose symptoms. Some effects of an overdose don't present themselves right away.

Assess the patient
- Stay as calm as possible and assure them that help is coming.
- Confirm that the airways are protected; also, ensure breathing and the presence of pulse.
- If unconscious but breathing, carefully place the person in the recovery position by rolling the person toward you onto their side. Bend the top leg so both hip and knee are at right angles. Gently tilt their head back to keep the airway open.
- If the person is conscious, provide reassurance and keep them comfortable.

Begin CPR if necessary
- If the person is not breathing or breathing is dangerously weak.

Medical Treatment
The medical team might take any or all the following steps towards treating the condition, after identifying the medication ingested:
- Gastric lavage (stomach pumped) for elimination of drug from the stomach
- Administration of activated charcoal to avoid absorption of the drug in the body
- Administration of an antidote to counter the effects of the ingested drug
- Medically manage serious symptoms such as seizures, low blood pressure, irregular heart rate, and gastrointestinal bleeding
- Relieve respiratory distress with an artificial respirator
- Administer fluids by an intravenous drip line
- Blood and urine tests
- CT scan of the head, neck, and other areas
- Chest x-ray
- ECG (electrocardiogram, or heart tracing)
- Mental health and social work evaluation and assistance

In serious cases, the person may need to be admitted to the hospital for further treatment.

Contact Poison Control
- Call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 (in the U.S.) for instructions on how to proceed.
- Find items to help with treatment
- If possible, collect any drug containers or paraphernalia, any remaining drug samples, or even the person's vomit to give to the medical team.

What NOT TO Do
- Do NOT let them sleep
- Do NOT make them throw up
- Do NOT make them eat or drink anything, especially alcohol
- Do NOT wait for the drug to wear off
- Do NOT leave them alone
- Do NOT put them in the shower
- Do NOT try to reason with them or give your opinions about the situation
- Do NOT put yourself in danger