

# QUITTING CHEMSEX



**MAIN***line*



**Do the benefits of use no longer outweigh the downsides?**

*Have you been gradually increasing your drug use?*

**Are you becoming more isolated and using alone frequently?**

*Can you no longer have sexual activity without using drugs?*

**Are you slipping and gradually losing everything?**

## IS IT TIME TO QUIT CHEMSEX?

No one becomes dependent overnight – it's a gradual process. When to quit varies from person to person. While one individual may need to experience a complete loss before reaching a turning point, a single negative encounter can be the catalyst for another.

Occasionally, problematic drug use emerges even without pronounced symptoms, leading some to deny the loss of control. The decision to quit

using drugs during sexual activities is continually postponed, resulting in an enduring cycle of sex, substance use, and increasingly challenging comedowns.





# Checklist

**The following questions can help assess your current status:**

- Are you using more and more frequently (on your own)?
- Do you use more than you intended?
- Are you craving to use again between sex dates?
- Do you need more chems to achieve the same effect?
- Do you use extra chems to delay or ease the comedown?
- Do you experience more and more regular complaints after using and during recovery?
- Do you cancel appointments because you have used/want to use?
- Do you continue to use despite increasing negative symptoms?
- Is your use less and less linked to sex?
- Are you unable to have sex without drugs?
- Are you troubled by your drug use?
- Do you often feel a desire to use less or quit?
- Have you tried in vain to reduce/quit before?
- Does your use make it harder to fulfil your daily obligations?
- Do you have relationship problems as a result of your use?
- Do you sometimes use while driving, working or studying?
- Do you secretly use while visiting family or with friends who do not use drugs?

## **BE CRITICAL AND HONEST WITH YOURSELF!**

The more questions you answer positively, the more indications that your drug use has become problematic.





# 1. Chemsex symptoms

However, everyone's situation differs, and one thing is sure: the longer and more intense your use, the more your symptoms will increase. These problems can occur in all sorts of areas. Common symptoms with regular use of stimulants like crystal methamphetamine (Tina), 3-MMC, crack and other uppers are:

## Physical:

- Slimming or looking ill
- Poor health/being sick frequently
- Dental damage
- Sleep problems
- Lack of energy
- Restlessness in the body
- Muscle spasms
- Losing consciousness

## Mental:

- Feelings of depression
- Feelings of emptiness, loneliness and apathy
- Feelings of despair
- Suicidal tendencies
- Intense feelings of shame and guilt
- Strongly fluctuating moods
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Paranoid thoughts/hallucinations
- (Long-term) psychoses

## Sexual:

- Obsessively engaging in porn and/or (cam) sex
- Reduced or no libido
- Crossing sexual boundaries
- Sexual abuse or rape
- No longer having sex without chems
- More and more frequent STIs

## Social/societal:

- Problems at work or with studies
- Debt and/or financial problems
- In trouble with law enforcement authorities
- Social isolation
- Neighborhood quarrels
- Loss of contact with family and friends
- Loss of job, home or partner
- Suicidal attempts



## 2. Sex without chems

Did you have sex mainly or only with chems for an extended period of time? Then, building a sex life without chems is often one of the biggest challenges. Sex and chems often become inseparable. Learning to enjoy sex without chems again takes time, commitment, patience and creativity.

A common complaint from people who engaged in chemsex is that 'regular' sex has become boring. They find it challenging to get aroused. This is mainly because the brain's chemistry is out of balance. Chems give a massive boost to dopamine in the brain. Dopamine gives a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction. Those repeated extraordinarily high shots of dopamine and the drug itself damaged neurotransmitters. The longer and more intense you use, the longer it will take for your brain to recover and for it to be physically possible again to experience pleasure from sex without chems. This can take several months or up to a year (if not more).

A variety of emotional aspects also play an essential role. Many individuals use chems to feel more confident, free, or are simply in search of an escape from their daily life. Concerns about HIV and hepatitis C or ageing may play a role, as well as struggles with one's sexual orientation or desires. On chems, those thoughts fade away, and you might dare to do things you would never do

otherwise. If you want to build a sex life without drugs, you will have to examine what the emotional aspects underlying your drug use are.



## 3. Grief

A life without using also means a sex life without chems. Let go of the thought of having sex with chems sometime in the future. This only causes cravings and can lead to relapse. Some experience this letting go as a process of mourning. In doing so, they actually go through stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

**Denial:**

*"Maybe I don't need to quit completely?"*

**Anger:**

*"I just want to fucking use chems!"*

**Bargaining:**

*"One night a month should be fine, right?"*

**Depression:**

*"I'll never be able to have normal sex again."*

**Acceptance:**

*"I can manage quite well without chems. My sex life will be good again."*

Quitting chems can feel like something has been taken away from you. But remember that your sexual experiences during chemsex were extreme. Incidents that would never have happened without drug use. Put your memories in perspective. Realise that you experienced the 'impossible'. Try not to see sex without chems as dull or domesticated. The chems caused the emotional connection you felt when you were high. Not by the physical contact. It may have felt like you were deeply connected to your sex partner, but many say afterwards that under the influence, it (often) doesn't matter who the sex partner is. When you have sex without chems, it's not a weak substitute for sex under the influence; it's just something completely different. Take on the challenge of making a real connection with your sex partner(s).





## 4. Timing

So, when is it time for sex without chems again? That depends a lot on your personal situation. How much craving are you experiencing? How much support do you have? Are you in a relationship?

If you had a satisfying sex life before you started chems and were good with intimacy, you have these previous experiences to fall back on. If you already experienced difficulties before starting with chems during sex, then the challenge is more significant. In that case, consider talking to a sex therapist.

### **No sex for a while**

Just thinking about sex can make you want to call the dealer. Do you get horny often, and does it make you feel like using all the time? Some people anxiously avoid sex because of this.

If you sense that the thought of sex immediately triggers craving, it is a good idea to avoid sex for the time being until you notice that you experience less craving overall. Some don't feel like having sex after they stop. After doing it on chems alone for a long time, they put sex on hold for a while. Sometimes even for a year or more. That way, they can entirely focus their attention on recovery. And they encounter less situations that trigger cravings. It gives the brain time to recover. It can even be a relief not to be occupied with sex for a while.

The idea of having sex again without intoxication makes many people who formerly used nervous and sometimes even anxious. Be careful not to let that anxiety become the leading factor. If you keep putting off sex without chems, over time, it will become an almost impossible task. Unless you decide to swear off sex completely, you will have to take this step at some point. Know that you are not the only one who finds sexuality complicated. Give yourself time and space, and don't expect to have great sex right away. Possibly, you first need to get used to being intimate at all without intoxication. Think of it as a quest for discovery that you can continue for years.

### **New sexual experiences**

Others who quit chemsex do not want to wait/stop their sex life. For them, it is unrealistic to imagine not having sex for a while. Be aware that sex can trigger you to use them again, and relapse is lurking. Still, it is not necessarily wrong to quickly experiment with sex again. By having sexual experiences without drugs, you learn about new possibilities and make new connections in your brain. It may be complex and weird initially, but it is 'real'. You might find out that certain things don't work for you at all without using. Give yourself time and space to rediscover yourself.

## 5. Quitting independently

Did you conclude that it's time to stop using? Be prepared; know that quitting uppers like Tina, crack, or 3-MMC can be pretty tough. Quitting on your own requires motivation and much discipline. Ask for support from family, friends or others who have gone through the same thing.

### ***! Do you have a history of psychosis, depression or suicidality?***

Then, quitting under professional supervision is advisable. Do you absolutely not want to do that? In that case, make sure you have contact with someone you trust daily. Seek help if things do seem to be slipping.

Do you take antidepressants? Do not stop taking them under any circumstances!

### ***! Are you physically dependent on downers such as GHB, GBL, alcohol, benzos or opiates?***

Never simply quit using downers. Quitting on your own is dangerous and can even be fatal. Always go to a clinic to quit under supervision.

### **Tips while quitting**

- ***Today, I'm not using***

Some want an immediate and complete turnaround and aim to quit forever. Others prefer to set themselves somewhat less far-reaching goals. The advantage of smaller goals is that they are more achievable, and the prospect remains strong. Whatever applies to you, set yourself an intent not to use today. It is possible for virtually anyone to survive a day without using.

- ***Geographical fix***

Quitting often requires a rigorous change in your lifestyle. You will have to cut contacts and avoid certain places, people and things. Some people move and start over. This is a way to start with a clean slate without being constantly triggered by your surroundings. Be wary of a geographical quick fix- just moving is not enough. It will not solve some issues, and those issues will follow you wherever you go.

- **Seek support**

It is easier to quit if those around you support you. Seek support from family and friends. Visit a support group. It helps tremendously to receive support from people who have been through the same thing.

- **Fill your days**

Planning, using and recovering from sex dates with chems takes quite a lot of time. If you stop, you are likely to suddenly find yourself with much spare time, which can lead to boredom. This may tempt some to use again. Find other activities for the freed-up time. Ask friends and family to help you fill up your weekends.

- **Ditch everything to do with chems**

Plan your last use and throw out anything use-related that you have in your home. Not just the chems themselves but also pipes, needles, filters, mirrors and tapes. Remember to check your bags and clothes. Discard them for good.

- **Ban contact**

Delete all dating apps from your phone. Delete and block friends who use and dealers from your contact list, and delete your call history. Get a new phone number and open a new email address if necessary. Delete all your old social media accounts. In other words, make sure old contacts

from the scene can't contact you, and you can't contact them. If necessary, undertake this task with a friend. Saying goodbye to your 'old self' can often be very difficult.

- **Alcohol and cannabis**

Some individuals find that consuming cannabis, either by drinking or smoking, helps alleviate the initial symptoms of withdrawal. This can be somewhat comforting, as it offers relaxation and relief. But the intoxication itself can also be triggering and makes you less resistant to craving. Many slips start with alcohol or cannabis use.

- **Relapse is not the end of the quitting process**

You may not manage to quit on the first attempt successfully and sustainably. You are by no means the only one struggling. Remember that relapse is part of the quitting process for many, especially in the beginning. Keep trying until you do succeed.



- ***Sabotaging thoughts***

You will probably have sabotaging thoughts throughout your quitting process. Your drug-obsessed mind will continuously try to make you use again. All kinds of excuses, denials and reasons to use will run through your head. Like: my habit isn't too bad, I don't really have a problem, or I deserve a pipe now. It can help to label that temptation from within yourself, to consider it as a kidnapper of sorts. Think: the monster now makes me think I deserve a snort, pipe or slam. This makes it easier to recognise and refrain from going along with it.

- ***Practise your 'elevator pitch'***

An 'elevator pitch' is a short, ready-made story. You can try to avoid your friends who use, but it could happen that someone suddenly suggests using together. In that case, it is helpful to prepare a ready-made answer. This prevents you from getting caught off guard and slipping. Your 'elevator pitch' should be short and powerful and make it convincingly clear that you do not use chems. Imagine different situations and, if necessary, practise with a friend. Create a pitch that suits you and practise it as many times as possible until it comes out fluently and confidently.



## 6. Stages of recovery

Using chems deeply affects how your brain works and how you experience things. It takes time to recover your brain chemistry and return to your old self. While you recover, you may have to build a new type of life. Allow yourself some time for this; it won't happen overnight. How you experience quitting and when you experience it are personal matters.

How long you used, how much you used, your age, and personal circumstances play a significant role in this. In quitting chemsex, you can distinguish between several stages. How long each stage lasts varies from person to person. Sometimes, symptoms and stages overlap.

### Stage 1: The crash

When you quit after a period of heavy use, initially, there is a physical and emotional 'crash'. This may last a few days to a few weeks. During this time, you often have intense cravings and mood swings. Also, consider physical symptoms such as tremors (uncontrollable shaking), extreme fatigue, severe appetite and sleep problems. Some people suffer from gritting teeth, jaw tension and night sweats. Often, psychological symptoms such as depressive feelings, anxious thoughts and despair also come into play. Some suffer from paranoia and hallucinations. In most cases, the worst symptoms subside in the first week. Concentration problems and memory loss may also occur. This can persist

for several months but is often at its worst at the start. To quit successfully, you must first get through the crash. During the crash period, the emphasis is on refuelling physically and mentally. Because the craving is often intense and the mental state is unstable, it is crucial to avoid temptations.

### Tips & Tricks

- Be sure to take your time for the crash period. If necessary, take time off from work, studies or social obligations.
- Throw away all utensils and chems.
- Make sure you have enough food and refreshments at home so you can stay in bed if necessary.
- Avoid places, people and things that remind you of sex or chems.
- Sleep a lot, eat healthy and drink enough.
- Take multivitamins daily.
- Make sure people know about your situation and make arrangements for daily contact.
- Focus on today and try not to look too much ahead.
- Remind yourself that most intense feelings are part of withdrawal and will go away on their own.
- You will be very emotionally unstable during this period, so avoid making important decisions.
- If you feel you are becoming a danger to yourself or those around

you, seek help!

- If psychotic symptoms such as severe paranoia or hallucinations persist for days or get worse, seek help!

### Stage 2: The pink cloud

Once the worst 'crash' is over, a period follows where everything seems to be moving forward. This often lasts a few weeks to months. Physically and mentally, you have regained some strength. You may feel better than you have in ages, and everything seems to improve. Many feel relieved and euphoric during this period—however, the first dreams of using often surface during this stage.

### Tips & Tricks

- Don't be overconfident, and acknowledge the seriousness of your situation. Relapse is lurking.
- If you haven't already, delete all your contacts who use, and your dating profiles.
- Hang in there and harness the energy you feel from gaining strength.
- For example, arrange for an (addiction) coach or buddy to support you weekly and motivate you to stay sober. Find someone to help you with practical issues like dealing with craving. This is not yet the time to tackle underlying problems. It is, however, an excellent

time to identify your triggers.

- When it comes to slipping up, boredom is a trap for many. Ensure you stay busy and don't have too many empty hours in your week. Ask friends and family to help fill up your day(s).
- Set small achievable goals every day, such as staying awake all day, taking a brisk walk or calling two people daily.
- During this period, try to restore a normal sleep rhythm by sleeping at night and avoiding naps during the day.

### Stage 3: The wall

After a few weeks of increased energy and hope, many encounter a wall. The reality of a life without chemsex hits hard. This usually lasts from a few weeks to a few months. The body and mind are slowly recovering. You may suffer from poor concentration, difficulty planning and absorbing information. This is because the brain's chemistry is recovering. Craving for chems may still come up regularly. Feelings suppressed with chems often come up in full force now. Some no longer enjoy anything at this stage and experience a sense of emptiness and dullness. This is a condition called anhedonia, which also occurs among people suffering from burnout, depression or schizophrenia. This also concerns the natural brain chemistry (mainly dopamine) being



disrupted. In addition, dopamine receptors are often damaged by chems use. This recovery takes time. For many, this is the most dangerous period. The belief and good spirits of quitting fade into the background. It seems as if only boredom, depression and despair lie ahead. You may experience extra craving and desire for sex during this stage. It is as if your brain is doing everything possible to get you back on the chems.

### Tips & Tricks

- Remember that most symptoms stem from an imbalance in your brain. Restoration of brain chemistry takes time. Know that anhedonia caused by use usually lessens or disappears after a few months.
- Sex and chems soon become two sides of the same coin in your brain. As a result, thinking about sex can easily trigger a memory of chems. Don't just think about the euphoric horny sex you had while under the influence. You will tend to do this because these memories make you feel slightly better. Also, force yourself to think about the harmful and dark sides of your use. Recall the complete picture of your use, right down to the bitter end.
- A major reason for relapse is boredom and loneliness. If you haven't started using yet, now is the time to visit support groups. People won't look at you strangely; everyone is in the same situation. Support groups give more insight, structure and distraction, and you get to make new contacts.
- Start volunteering, pick up an old hobby, visit friends or undertake activities where you regularly interact with people who don't use chems.
- In short, plan things to keep you busy and socially connected.
- Exercise regularly. Exercise makes you feel better. It gives satisfaction, distraction and helps physical recovery.
- Apart from sports, you can also do yoga or practice mindfulness. It helps relax and make you aware of your body and mind.
- Avoid places and people that can tempt you. Think saunas, (sex) clubs, cruise spots, your dealer's street, old friends who use, or certain parties. This is not yet the time to experiment again with dating or going out to places where many people are under the influence. If you do want to go out, do so with sober friends.
- Try to become aware of what is triggering your cravings. Write down your triggers and avoid those things as much as possible.

### Stage 4: Adjustment

Now that you have overcome the barrier, you start to feel more energetic and sharper. In this stage, you will notice that you are less likely to be triggered. The overwhelming craving will gradually diminish. Whereas previously, you were still triggered daily, this may now happen weekly. Depending on the duration and intensity of your use, this is usually somewhere between months four and six.

The brain chemistry also balances somewhat, and, gradually, you experience pleasure in life again. Instead of 'surviving', you can focus on your 'new life'. Adjusting physically, sexually, socially and emotionally to a drug-free life now becomes the primary goal. You start to realise what you have lost through your use and the potential damage you have done. Feelings of grief, sadness, shame and guilt often accompany this. It is common for intense emotions that have been temporarily numbed by chems to surface suddenly.

### Tips & Tricks

- Immerse yourself in meditation, yoga or mindfulness.
- Visit friends weekly where you can be yourself.
- Express your feelings regularly with friends or in a support group.
- Keep a diary and re-read it frequently.
- You may still unexpectedly find yourself in situations that can strongly trigger the desire to use. This can trigger quite some emotions. Give yourself time, allow yourself to make mistakes, don't be too hard on yourself and adjust things that don't work for you.
- In the initial stages, it is essential to minimise exposure to triggers as much as possible. The ultimate goal is to cultivate awareness and effectively address both triggers and cravings. Resist giving in; instead, confront the complex feelings and employ alternative behaviours. Try doing something other than using. For example, go running or do breathing exercises when you feel cravings. If you do this more often, you will notice it gets easier.
- Stay vigilant for cravings around sex. Because this is so profoundly linked to chems, this is where most triggers will come up.
- This is the stage to address deeper and often long-standing negative patterns. Consider talking to a psychologist, psychiatrist, or sex therapist. Earlier, you may have avoided complicated feelings by using and having sex. Now, you will have to find other ways to cope. Preferably, find a therapist who works with LGBT+ people and is focused on learning practical new life skills.

**Stage 5: Recovery**

After six months to a year, you will have pretty much put your use well behind you. For some, it now feels like a different life, while others still think about using daily. The fact is that recovery is an ongoing process. You can still get triggered at unexpected moments.

**Tips & Tricks**

- Stay alert to situations that may tempt you.
- Keep working on personal issues that contributed to your use.
- Ask yourself regularly if you are still prioritising your recovery enough.
- Celebrate when you have not used chems for a year and be proud of yourself!





## 7. Triggers, cravings and slip-ups

When you quit chems, you are likely to face triggers, cravings and slipups. This is especially true if you have used for a long time and intensively. Especially in the beginning, temptations will be hard. It doesn't take much to crave for using again: the bleep of an app notification, hearing the word 'chems' or feeling alone for a moment. In time, this will lessen naturally. But you can also do things yourself to improve the process and prevent relapse.

**Process: trigger >> thoughts >> craving >> use**

A trigger is something that unleashes a memory of using. This memory often makes you think about drugs. Especially in the beginning, these thoughts often lead to intense craving. If you do not actively take action, you will soon have another snort in front of your nose, a pipe in your hand or a slam in your arm. Realise that the worst cravings usually subside after a few minutes. Experiencing craving doesn't automatically have to lead to using!

### Triggers

There are external and internal triggers. External triggers are things that are clearly external to you and trigger a memory of use. Examples include a particular smell, a dating app tone, running into someone you know from sex parties or cycling through the

neighbourhood where your regular dealer lives. An internal trigger is something inside you that triggers a memory of using. Usually, these are emotions. If you are down or sad, you may be tempted to suppress those feelings by using. Some, feel like using when they are happy. They want to celebrate and enhance their feelings. For others, feeling hurt, criticised, embarrassed, rejected or bored is a trigger. Any strong emotion or feeling can be a trigger if it has become linked to your use. Apart from emotions, horniness can also be a strong trigger. .

How do you avoid triggers? The previous chapter has already covered strategies for dealing with triggers. Make sure you have no drugs in the house, no messages you can get from sex buddies and no empty weekends ahead. If you find yourself being triggered very quickly, you can rearrange your home, listen to new music, walk different routes or shop elsewhere. Anything to ensure that routines change and you don't trigger memories of chemsex. But ultimately, you won't be able to avoid being triggered ever again. Sometimes, you are not aware that something is a trigger, and you suddenly find yourself thinking about using. That one thought quickly leads to more sex and chems thoughts, and suddenly you experience massive cravings. So, the key is to stop the thoughts before they put you in a state of craving.

There are several ways to do this. Be creative and try to find a way that works best for you.

- **Visualise**

If you are a very visually oriented, you can visualise your use as a programme on TV or a movie in the cinema. Imagine you are sitting watching yourself using. Grab the remote control and turn on another program or movie. Make sure the alternative is something that immediately makes you feel good. For example, visualise a nice holiday or someone you love dearly.

- **Evoke strong emotions**

If you are an emotional person, evoking emotions that do not lead to use is an option. By stimulating these emotions, thoughts of use will fade into the background. For example, think of something that can make you feel outraged (e.g. politics) or something that scares you (e.g. spiders or heights).

- **Physical distractions**

A physical distraction might work better if you are not very good at visualising or evoking emotions. A common way is to wear a thick elastic band around your wrist. Whenever you catch yourself having a habitual thought, stretch the elastic band and give yourself a pain

stimulus. This helps to interrupt the thought. If you are at home, squeezing ice cubes for a few minutes can also help.

What to do if you still experience cravings? If you have not been able to stop the thoughts and are feeling intense cravings? This is annoying and can be frightening. But if you stick to not giving in to it, the craving usually subsides within a few minutes. There are some things you can do when you feel craving.

***Always remember that craving only sometimes leads to use!***

### **Tips & Tricks**

- **Surf your craving**

Craving is very much like a wave. It first gets bigger and bigger until it reaches a peak and breaks. After this, it rolls out and disappears right back into the sea. It is the same with craving. If you don't move towards using, the craving wave will break and disappear again. Imagine that you're surfing atop a wave of craving towards the shore, staying above it rather than within. Glide on the craving wave beneath you until it gradually subsides back into the sea.

- **Be honest about your cravings and talk about it!**

If you experience cravings regularly, talking about it is one of the most

effective things you can do. Many people feel ashamed, play nice or keep it to themselves. In secret, your craving takes on a life of its own. You will be surprised how much relief talking about craving can give. Talking will lessen the craving's grip on you. Find someone you can be completely honest with. This can be a friend, family member or sponsor. It is essential that this person listens and does not immediately panic or judge. Share information about triggers, craving and relapse. It is crucial for them and for you to realise that craving is part of the process and does not translate directly into relapse.

- **Tell someone as soon as possible!**

Don't give your feelings of craving time to progress. If you feel a craving creeping up, don't wait; immediately call someone you can talk to. If you go to NA (narcotics anonymous) or CMA (crystal meth anonymous) meetings, there is usually a list of people you can always call if you are having a hard time.

- **Go to a support meeting**

Don't wait until your favourite meeting; go to the first possible meeting. If you have never been before, this is the time to start. Listen or share your story. Most importantly, surround yourself with

people who are down-to-earth and can support you. You can always attend an AA meeting if there is no CMA or NA meeting.

- **Fast-forward your thoughts**

Thoughts that lead to cravings are usually thoughts of 'good' times. You mainly think back to your first time having sex on chems, sex with people you found attractive or other horny moments. When such thoughts fill your head, force yourself to think of the 'bad' times too. The people you would never have had sex with sober, the frightening psychoses, terrible comedown, the things you lost and how you felt at the end when you decided it was enough.

- **Exercise**

If you feel cravings rising, high-intensity exercise can provide distraction. Take a brisk walk. Go jogging, swimming, running or to the gym. You will notice that physical movement also moves your mind. Move and clear your head again.



**Slip-ups**

It will be the exception rather than the rule if you manage to quit chems like Tina, 3-MMC or crack forever on the first try. This is especially true if you have used for a long time and intensively. Quitting chems is a learning process and relapse is often part of that process. It's like learning to ride a bike. It usually entails falling, getting up and carrying on again. How you deal with slip-ups in use matters a lot. Stop as soon as possible, don't be too hard on yourself and learn from your slip-ups!

**Tips & Tricks**

- **Get up and move on**

Relapse can trigger feelings of hopelessness, shame, guilt or anger. Don't linger too much with these feelings. It won't solve anything in the end. Instead, focus your energy on getting up and moving on again. Take time to look at what led to your relapse. And what can you do to ensure you will go about this differently in the future?

- **Learning process**

When you relapse, you may think that everything has been a total waste of time. Like a mountain climb and you have fallen. To get to the top, you have to start all over again. But you can also look at it constructively. If you used one day again after six weeks, that's

still five weeks and six days sober. That's probably much more than in the six weeks before you stopped. Maybe it's not perfect, but it's still significant progress. You keep everything you learned during the quitting process. Getting up and carrying on may also become easier and easier. Keep going until you do succeed.

- **Quit quickly**

It can be tempting to go all out once you have relapsed. Don't think fuck it. Now that I've started, I might as well continue using for a while. The sooner you stop, the easier it will be to pick up the pieces and turn the slip-up into a learning moment.

## 8. Support

Chemsex can lead you to isolation. If you really want to quit, you need to reconnect with people. Talking about it and asking others for help is the most critical step. This can be with family, friends or people who have been through the same thing as you.

### Family and friends

Usually, those around you have little or no knowledge of the seriousness of your use. Don't live your sober life in the closet! You need people to support your new lifestyle. If people do not know about your problem, they cannot take this into account. Trust the people who have continued to support you. Only confide in friends outside the sex scene. Always be honest. You will find that it also brings you closer together.

Talking honestly about it can bring up a lot of underlying emotions. There is also a foundation that provides information, advice and support to loved ones of people who (formerly) used.

### Support groups

Find contact with people who have been through the same thing as you. Sharing experiences makes you feel less alone and allows you to support each other. It also allows you to discuss things you would rather not share with friends or family. Get inspiration from people who used and who have successfully quit and are now living sober. It helps to see

up close that quitting for a long time is possible. At the same time, you can also contribute something for others. And it's an excellent place to make new friends who are not using.

Feeling resistance to support groups is not strange. You might think that such a meeting is not for you. Yet many end up finding support in these meetings. Even if you only go to listen, it creates a bond and provides support. The meetings make you realise that you don't have to cope alone and that there are people who want to support you. Visit different groups and see where you feel most at home. Try to visit a group for at least three months; that way, it will really be beneficial.

- **Narcotics Anonymous**

NA meetings are organised in many places. These are group meetings for people who have quit drugs. During the meeting, you listen to each other's experiences. People who have stopped for some time often have a mentor function. The meetings are attended by people who used all kinds of drugs.

The drug (s) you have issues with are not mentioned, and neither is the link to sex discussed. Participants of all ages, social backgrounds and sexual preferences attend. In big cities with a significant gay scene, there are sometimes special LGBT+ meetings.

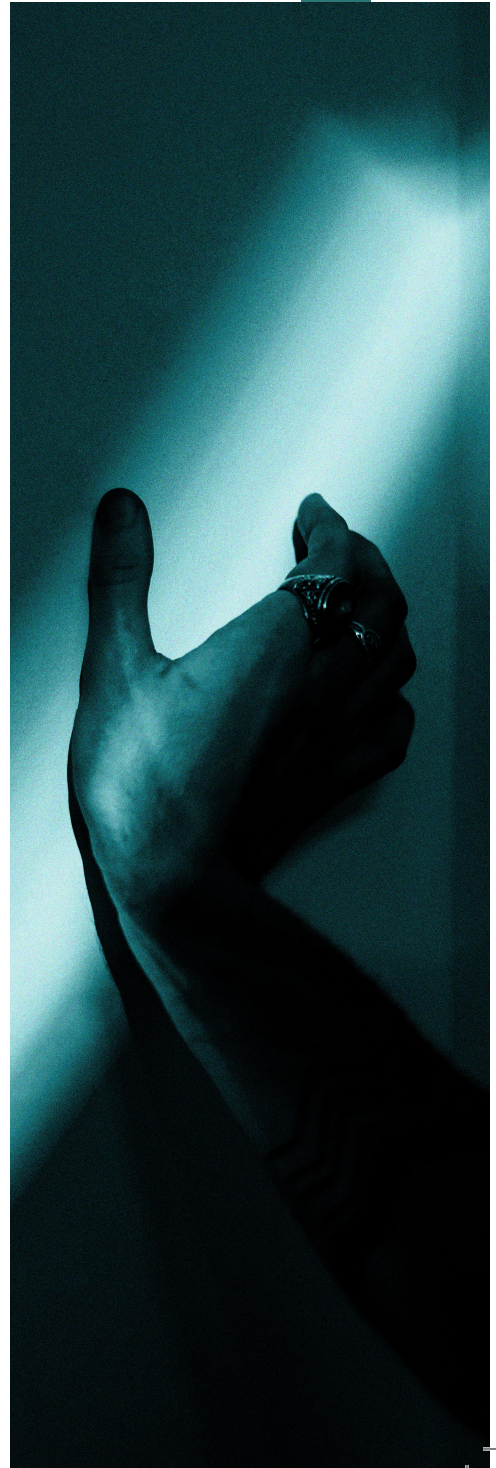
- **Crystal Meth Anonymous**

There is also a particular group for people who have used Tina: Crystal Meth Anonymous. The concept is the same as with NA, except that this group specifically discusses chems in relation to sex. More info can be found at [www.crystallmeth.org](http://www.crystallmeth.org).

- **Group discussions on chemsex**

In the Netherlands, Mainline organises fortnightly group discussions for gay or bi men who have quit chems during sex. In a private and confidential environment, men can talk about issues such as loneliness, sex without chems and how to deal with dating apps. The focus is on sharing experiences. A Mainline confidant with expertise on chems, sex and slamming is always present at the meetings. The evenings in Dutch are held every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month from 19:30 to 21:00. For English-speaking men, there is a meeting every second and fourth Wednesday of the month. Sign up at [chemsex@mainline.nl](mailto:chemsex@mainline.nl).

For more information, check [mainline.nl/en/chemsex-support](http://mainline.nl/en/chemsex-support)



## 9. Seek help

It might be that quitting alone is more than you can handle, and you seek professional help. There are more and more places to turn to for help. Still, chemsex is 'relatively new' in the Netherlands. Not all social workers in addiction care are familiar with the use of chems during sex. That doesn't mean they can't or won't help you. Many who quit chemsex still benefit from addiction care in practice, even if they are not yet fully attuned to the chemsex phenomenon. So don't expect them to have extensive knowledge about your specific issues. Accept that they probably don't know the ins and outs of chems or slamming.

By sharing your experiences with professionals, you can vent your heart and get information about dependency. Nice touch: you increase their expertise. There are many addiction treatment centres. Check out different clinics and their methods and choose what suits you best. Many therapies and consultations are covered by health insurance. Check with your health insurance in advance whether your treatment will be reimbursed. For reimbursement, you always need a referral from your GP.

Each treatment starts with one or more

intake interviews. The most suitable treatment is then determined. Clinical admission, part-time treatment and weekly one-to-one sessions are common forms of treatment. Inpatient and part-time treatment usually consists of individual and group sessions. Sometimes, some form of movement therapy, creative therapy or meditation/mindfulness is also offered. Clinical admissions generally last four to six weeks. After this, you can often move on to part-time or weekly sessions.

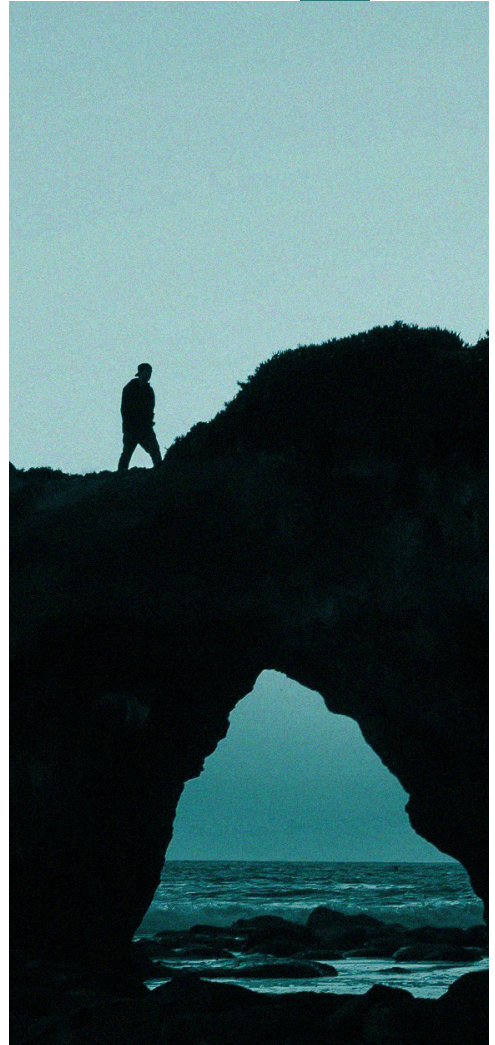
### **Treatment in the Netherlands**

Check [www.afkickkliniekwijzer.nl](http://www.afkickkliniekwijzer.nl) or [www.zorgkaartnederland.nl/verslavingszorg](http://www.zorgkaartnederland.nl/verslavingszorg) for options in your area. You can also opt for admission to a foreign private clinic.

A new chemsex clinic was launched in Rotterdam in 2022. Addiction Treatment Centre Antes offers support and care for people who want to quit or have quit chemsex. The team has extensive knowledge of chemsex and deploys professionals with various expertise, including trauma therapy.



A digital care map for people who (formerly) engaged in chemsex is available. This provides an up-to-date national overview of organisations and professionals who know what chemsex is and offer appropriate help and support in the process. **Check: [chemsex.nl/en/care-finder/](https://chemsex.nl/en/care-finder/)**



## Mainline chemsex-team

For info, advice and support around quitting chems, email:  
**[chemsex@mainline.nl](mailto:chemsex@mainline.nl)** or Whatsapp to **06 - 11 16 33 41** (Leon)

# Colophon

This is a Mainline publication. Mainline's mission is to promote the health and improve the rights of people who use drugs. Mainline has provided health education training, published a lifestyle magazine, and worked with partner organisations abroad for over 30 years. All with a focus on harm reduction.

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