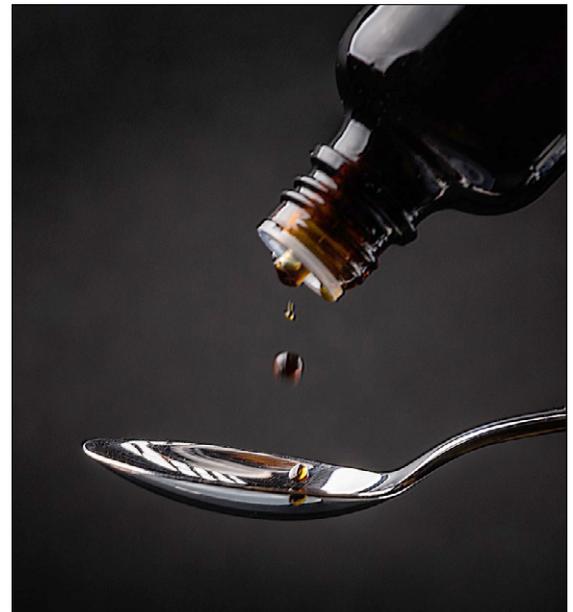


ABOUT

Lean, also known as Purple Drank, Barre, Sizzurp or Syrup is a drink from the USA made from a cough syrup that contains two drugs, **codeine** and **promethazine**. The syrup is then mixed with a fizzy drink and sometimes a sweet to cover up the taste of the medicine to make a purple cocktail.

It was made popular by hip-hop artists on the Houston rap scene like DJ Screw and Big Moe, who rapped over a slowed-down beat that mirrored the effects of Lean.

In the UK there is no ready-made codeine and promethazine cough syrup and some people buy promethazine or codeine separately or mix them with other over the counter cough medicines.



EFFECTS

These will depend on what you use to make it, but Lean made from codeine and promethazine has been described as having several stages or levels:

Stage 1 is a mild energy lift

Stage 2 relaxation and a feeling like alcohol plus cannabis with mild hallucinations

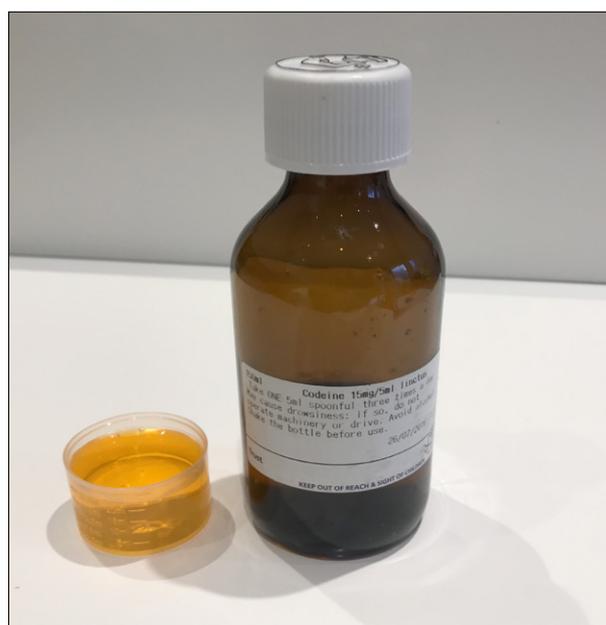
Stage 3 is an “out of body state” like a low dose of ketamine

Stage 4 is a fully dissociative or “tripped out” state like being on a high dose of ketamine.

Effects start within 30-60 minutes and last for about six hours. Comments from users include “everything was slowed down”, “fun to drink (if you can avoid falling asleep)” and “this is some trippy stuff”. Time can feel speeded up or slowed down, and Lean is often used in company: “it’s a community drug... you’re not really going to drink it all by yourself, you’re going to pour for all your friends.”

DRUG INFO

Codeine is an opiate drug often taken for pain relief and it is also taken as a cough medicine and to stop diarrhoea. When you take codeine your body breaks it down into morphine, which is what gives it its pain-relieving effects and also what can possibly poison or kill you. **Not everyone breaks down codeine to morphine at the same level so a dose that could be safe for one person could be very dangerous for someone else.** It is a Class B drug and is normally only legally available on prescription, however some weaker codeine medicines are available from chemists without a prescription.



Codeine effects	Starts	Peaks	Lasts
Relaxed, warm, chilled buzz, no pain, confident, itchy skin, slow heartrate, feeling sick, throwing up, drowsy, dry mouth, feeling restless, small pupils, constipation, rash, stomach pain, dizzy, confused, mood swings.	30-45 mins	1-2 hours	4-6 hours

Promethazine was first prescribed to treat allergies but is now mostly used to help people sleep, or to stop them feeling or being sick. On its own it is a mild depressant, but at higher doses it has been linked to hallucinations. It is thought to make opioid drugs like codeine, morphine and heroin feel stronger.

Promethazine effects	Starts	Peaks	Lasts
Drowsiness, feeling sick, throwing up, blotchy or red skin, big pupils, blurred vision, dry mouth and tongue, fast heartrate, high temperature, loss of muscle control, feeling agitated, not able to pee, twitchy eye movements, hallucinations.	20 mins	2-4 hours	4-6 hours



Dextromethorphan (DXM) is found in some cough and cold medicines. It is a dissociative drug, and when people take too much it can make them psychotic (when they're not sure what's real) and paranoid and they can trip out. DXM can make you sleepy, put you into a coma and you can even stop breathing. People can feel like they need more and more of it and some people can have withdrawal symptoms. It is available without prescription in over the counter products.

Dextromethorphan (DXM) effects	Starts	Peaks	Lasts
Feeling high, happy, chilled, "up", speedy, no pain, feeling drunk, loss of muscle control, giggling, "out of body" experiences, hallucinations, time speeds up or slows down, fast heartrate, sweating, blotchy or red skin, throwing up, feeling agitated, drowsy, big pupils, twitchy eye movements.	30-60 mins	1.6-2.5 hours	6 hours

Many of these over the counter medicines also contain paracetamol which can be very dangerous if you take too much.

Overdose from paracetamol can cause permanent liver damage and can kill.



LONG TERM USE

Regular users of **codeine** need more and more to get the same effect. They get cravings and when they stop taking it can get feelings of withdrawal such as cold sweats, sickness, throwing up and not being able to sleep.

Regular users of **DXM** also develop tolerance (when they need more and more of the drug to get the same effect). Some users may have cravings, feelings of withdrawal and the need to use it more regularly. Longer term use can lead to psychosis and damage to thinking and memory skills.



DOSAGE

Different people will react differently to Lean, and this depends on lots of things including your weight, how much codeine you've taken in the past and how well your body breaks down codeine into morphine. People prefer different amounts of codeine and promethazine, however some users of Lean say that too much promethazine can make you fall asleep. When mixing Lean from separate medicines, it can be tricky to work out how much to take and it's important to measure the amount of the active ingredient (in mg) rather than the weight of the liquid (in ml). For example codeine linctus in the UK comes in both 15mg/5ml and 25mg/5ml strengths, so the same amount of liquid could contain different amounts of codeine.

	Dose	
	Lower	Higher
Lean (codeine plus promethazine)	100mg codeine 12mg promethazine	200mg codeine 25mg promethazine

Dosage (continued)

Dosage information is taken from users, research and other resources and should not be taken as recommendations. People can react differently to the same dosage. What is safe for one person can be deadly for another.

	Dose			Dangerous dose	Signs of overdose
	Lower	Higher	Max daily dose*		
Promethazine	25mg	50mg	75mg	>100mg	Panic, overheating, sensitivity to bright light, blurred or double-vision, increased heart rate, confusion, can't concentrate, not knowing where you are, agitated, loss of muscle control, slow breathing, memory problems, wandering thoughts, talking rubbish, irritable, sudden muscle twitches, jumping at sudden sounds, seeing flashes of light, "tunnel vision", hallucinations, low or shallow breathing, seizures, unconscious, coma, sudden death.
Codeine	30mg	100mg	240mg	>400mg	Low or shallow breathing, pin-point (very small) pupils, blue or paler skin or lips, cold and clammy skin, unconscious, lack of breathing, coma, death.
DXM	100mg	400mg	120mg	>1500mg	Psychosis, extreme hallucinations, muscle spasms, seizures, overheating. When taken with other drugs can lead to serotonin syndrome which can be fatal. See page 7 for symptoms.
Paracetamol				>4000mg or more than 150mg/kg in any 24-hour period.	Paracetamol overdose can cause permanent liver damage and can kill. Signs of overdose include: feeling sick, throwing up, yellow skin and the whites of the eyes (jaundice), loss of co-ordination, stomach pain, low blood sugar which can cause symptoms including sweating, trembling and irritability.

If you think someone has overdosed on any of these drugs, call an ambulance immediately. A few seconds could save someone's life.

* This is the maximum daily dose on the drug information leaflet.

HARM REDUCTION

- **Start low, go slow.** While some of these medicines can be bought from a chemist they can still be very damaging. Poisoning or fatal overdose is possible with codeine, promethazine, DXM and paracetamol individually, and combining them puts you at risk of death or permanent damage. Start with a small dose.
- **Less is more.** Try to keep your mix of medicines to a minimum. The more medications you add, the greater the risk you have of coming to harm.
- **Check the contents for paracetamol.** Paracetamol overdose can not only kill but also causes permanent liver damage. A standard bottle of over the counter cough and cold remedy for example can contain 8 grams of paracetamol, twice the maximum daily dose.
- **Adding alcohol** (either drinking alcohol when drinking Lean, or if alcohol is an ingredient of the syrups being used) increases the risk of overdose and may result in poisoning. Check for alcohol (sometimes called ethanol) on the ingredients of the syrup: some medicines contain over 3.3%.
- **Don't drive** under the influence of Lean. Tooling around the town blasting DJ Screw when twisted is a bad plan.
- **Avoid benzos and nitrous.** Adding benzodiazepines (like Valium/diazepam or Xanax/alprazolam) to the mix greatly increases the risk of overdose. Using nitrous oxide at the same time as Lean can make the effects of promethazine stronger and send you into a state of frenzy (called delirium).
- **Look after your mates.** Use with people who can respond in the event of an emergency and if using together don't all use Lean at the same time. Make sure one of you has a mobile phone that works, so that you can call an ambulance.



- DXM can lead to **serotonin syndrome** when combined with other medications including anti-depressants, antibiotics and painkillers. The main symptoms of serotonin syndrome are: rigid, jerky, twitchy unusual movements; fully dilated (big) pupils; overheating; shivering; racing heart; agitation and confusion. Serotonin syndrome can kill if it is not dealt with quickly. If in doubt, ring for an ambulance.
- **Naloxone** can reverse the effects of opioid overdose and saves lives. Contact your local drug treatment service for more information (see below for details).



Recovery Position: The recovery position is for someone who is unconscious but breathing normally. If they are not breathing normally first aid (CPR) is required, with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.



Start by placing their arm as if they are waving.



Place the other arm across their chest and hold their hand against their cheek.



Lift up the knee that is furthest from you. Continue to hold their hand in place.



Turn them on their side by pulling the knee towards you and down.

For further information on Overdose & Emergencies see [UK and Ireland DrugWatch Information Sheet](#).

Where to get help: We would advise anyone having problems with Lean or other drugs to seek medical support via their GP or the NHS. There are a wide range of local drug services throughout the UK, to find out what is available in your area please use the links below:

England: [Find Support | Frank](#) Scotland: [Scottish Drug Services](#)
Wales: [Dan 24/7](#) Northern Ireland: [Public Health Agency](#) ROI: [Drugs.IE](#)



Issuing public warnings or press alerts about new, over the counter or readily-available drugs may prove counterproductive, particularly if Lean has yet to become a significant issue in your local area. While alerts can raise awareness and highlight dangers they also risk publicising a new drug or drug combination.

Target harm reduction messages at those using or at risk of using if this has become an issue locally.

Avoid scare tactics: messages should highlight harms but still be realistic for the target audience.

Written by [Mark Adley](#) in association with [UK and Ireland DrugWatch](#): an informal online professional information network established by a group of professionals working in the UK and Irish drugs sector. The aim of the group is to raise/establish standards for drug information, alerts and warnings. It is currently an unfunded, bottom-up initiative that works in the spirit of mutual co-operation. Details of current members can be found [here](#).

A referenced version of this document for professionals is also available for download, along with other drug information sheets and resources from: michaellinnell.org.uk or thedrugswheel.com.