

Facts About:

Heroin

What is Heroin?

Heroin is a highly addictive illegal drug. On the street, it is also called smack, horse, junk and H. Heroin belongs to a group of drugs called *opioids*. It is made by chemically changing morphine, a natural substance found in *opium poppies*. Heroin looks like a white or brownish powder, because of impurities or additives. Street heroin can be pure or diluted (“cut”) with substances like starch, powdered sugar, talcum powder, other drugs, or strychnine.

Heroin can be *injected*, *snorted*, or *smoked*. When it is heated and burned, fumes are released and it can be inhaled. This is called “chasing the dragon.” Heroin can also be added to regular cigarettes or marijuana joints. Possessing, producing, or trafficking in heroin are criminal offenses that result in fines and/or prison sentences.

Short-term Effects

Depending on how heroin is used, the effects can be felt in seconds (intravenous, inhaled) or minutes (snorted, injected into a muscle under the skin). Heroin use results in feelings of intense pleasure (euphoria) and reduced pain. The immediate effects usually include a warm flushing of the skin, dry mouth, and a heavy feeling in the extremities. Nausea, vomiting, and severe itching are not uncommon. Longer lasting effects include “nodding” or alternating between a wakeful and drowsy state that occurs for several hours. The pupils of the eyes become smaller and breathing becomes shallow. Large doses can slow breathing so much that users can slip into a coma and die. It is difficult to know the strength of street heroin, so overdose and death can happen easily.

Long-term Effects

Injecting heroin regularly can lead to medical problems like collapsed veins, bacterial infections, abscesses, infectious diseases such as Hepatitis B, C and HIV, infection of the heart lining and valves, arthritis and other rheumatological problems. Smoking heroin often can lead to pneumonia and other lung conditions.

Consequences of Drug Use

Heroin decreases appetite, which can result in malnutrition. Chronic constipation is also common. Women can have irregular periods and men can become impotent. Frequent heroin use can lead to serious personal problems. Users may continue using even when job or schoolwork suffers, or when it causes financial, spiritual, or legal problems. Babies born to heroin-addicted mothers are often premature and underweight, and they go through withdrawal at birth. They can be infected with HIV, hepatitis, and blood poisoning.

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Heroin and Addiction

If heroin is used regularly, tolerance develops. This means more of the drug is needed to feel the same effects. When a dependent person stops using heroin, withdrawal symptoms start a few hours later. These symptoms include restlessness, yawning, runny nose, muscle and bone pain, sweating, tears, diarrhea, cramps, goose bumps, high blood pressure, and strong craving. These effects get stronger for two to four days, and then gradually weaken. Depression, insomnia, weakness, and stress can last for several weeks or months.

The choice is yours – choose to live free from addictions!