

## Heroin

Heroin has been popular a street drug for several decades, degrading lives everywhere it is used. It is both the most abused and the most rapidly acting of the opiates and usually appears as a white or brown powder or as the black sticky substance known on the streets as "black tar heroin." This drug is processed from morphine, which is a naturally occurring substance that is extracted from the seedpod of the Asian poppy plant.

Heroin is extremely addictive, sometimes creating dependence with just a few uses. In some areas, heroin use has subsided some during the past several years, but it's still being abused at a higher rate than in the early 1990s. This high rate of use extends to school-age children and is glamorized in music and films, which makes using heroin seem like the cool thing to do. Another attraction to young people is heroin's increasing purity and decreasing price.

### Street Names For Heroin:

A-Bomb (marijuana joint with heroin or opium; cigarette that contains heroin or marijuana), AIP (heroin from Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan), Antifreeze, Aries, Atom Bomb (marijuana mixed with heroin), Aunt Hazel...

Brown (street Heroin), bad seed, Ballot, Big H, Bin Laden - Heroin (after September 11), Bindle (a small packet of drug powder, often heroin, wrapped in tin foil), Black Pearl, Black Tar, Blanco, Blow, Blue Velvet (combination of elixir terpin hydrate with codeine and tripelethamine used as weak heroin substitute; combination of paregoric and PBZ (pyribenzamine or tripelethamine) used as weak heroin substitute), Bomb (Crack; heroin; large marijuana cigarette; high potency heroin), Bombita (mixture of cocaine and heroin), Bone (marijuana; \$50 piece of crack; high purity heroin)...

Canade (Heroin/marijuana combination), China White (Very pure heroin, scarce in the UK, more available in the US), Crank, Dirt, Dope, Dust (Cocaine, Heroin, PCP, narcotics in powder form; marijuana mixed with various chemicals; cocaine; heroin; PCP), El Diablito (Spanish), El Diablo (Spanish) fix, Frisco Speedball, Garbage (low-quality heroin), Gold...

H, Harry, H-Bomb (ecstasy mixed with heroin), Horse, horse bite, Jive, Junk (named because it's never pure on the street), Love Boat (Blunts mixed with marijuana & Heroin), Mother Pearl, Poor Man's Speedball (heroin and methamphetamine combo), Primo (a blunt refilled with marijuana and crack; crack; marijuana mixed with cocaine; crack and heroin; heroin, cocaine and tobacco, Scat, Shit, Skag, Smack, Sandwich (two layers of cocaine with heroin in the middle), Skunk, snow, Spider Blue, Snowball Cocaine and heroin), Snow Cones (smoked heroin mixed with marijuana), T's and Blues -

Talwin (pentazocine) and PBZ (pyribenzamine) used as a heroin substitute; tripeleminamine, Whack (heroin & PCP).

### **Terms For Heroin Use:**

**Back To Back** - Smoking crack after injecting heroin or using heroin after smoking crack

**Bad Bundle** - Inferior quality heroin

**Bad Seed** - Peyote, heroin, marijuana, marijuana combined with peyote

**Balloon** - Heroin supplier; container for drugs

**Belushi** - Using cocaine and heroin

**Bag**: packaging for drugs, especially heroin, which is often sold in small bags, e.g. a \$10 bag

**Chasing The Dragon**: smoking heroin from a piece of silver foil. The heroin is placed in a line on the foil and heated from below. The heroin becomes liquid and gives off a curl of smoke, which is inhaled through a tube.

**Clucking**: withdrawing from or experiencing withdrawal from heroin or other opiates.

**Cooking-up**: preparing drugs, especially Heroin, for injection

**Cold Turkey**: the symptoms and experience of withdrawing from heroin

**Cotton Shooter** - Desperate addict who injects the residue from cotton used to filter heroin

**Crisscrossing** - To set up a "line" of powder cocaine next to a line of heroin

**Dusting** - Adding PCP, heroin or another drug to marijuana

**Junky**: a person who is dependent on a drug, usually heroin. While the term is widely seen as derogatory, many people who use drugs use the term with each other

**Popping/Skinpopping** - Subcutaneous injection of heroin

**Rebujo** - Inhaling vapors of heroin and cocaine heated over a flame

**Sandwich** - Two layers of cocaine with heroin in the middle

**Snort**: Take drugs, mainly cocaine, amphetamines or heroin by inhaling into the nasal passages.

**Speedball**: mixture of an upper and a downer, usually speed and heroin or cocaine and heroin.

**Speedball Artist** - One who injects heroin and cocaine mixture

**Spoons** - A basic pipe named for its resemblance to the common utensil; paraphernalia associated with cocaine, often worn as jewelry; the bottom of

an aluminum soda can that is used as a tiny bowl to dissolve heroin, Wired (addicted).

### **Short-term Effects:**

The short-term effects of heroin abuse appear soon after a single dose and usually disappear quickly, after a few hours. The injection of heroin causes a surge of euphoria ("rush") and a warm flushing of the skin, a dry mouth, and heavy extremities. This initial euphoria is followed by the user going "on the nod," both a wakeful and drowsy state, with the user going in and out.

Cloudy, fuzzy mental functioning follows and is a condition due to the depression of the central nervous system.

### **Long-term Effects:**

The long-term effects of heroin appear after repeated use for some period of time. Chronic users may develop collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and valves, abscesses, cellulitis, and liver disease. Pulmonary complications, including various types of pneumonia, may result from the poor health condition of the abuser, as well as from heroin's depressing effects on respiration.

### **Serious, Possibly Fatal Effects:**

Abuse of this drug is associated with several serious health conditions, including fatal overdose, spontaneous abortion, collapsed veins, and, particularly in users who inject the drug, infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

Heroin abuse during pregnancy and its many associated environmental factors, like lack of prenatal care, have been associated with dangerous consequences, including low birth weight, an important risk factor for later developmental delay.

### **Withdrawal Effects:**

Regular abusers may start feeling withdrawal effects as early as a few hours after the last use. This produces drug cravings, restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea and vomiting, cold flashes with goose bumps ("cold turkey"), kicking movements ("kicking the habit"), and other symptoms. Major withdrawal symptoms peak between 48 and 72 hours after the last dose and subside after about a week.

Sudden withdrawal by heavily dependent users who are in poor health is

occasionally fatal, although heroin withdrawal is considered less dangerous than alcohol or barbiturate withdrawal. Some people have shown persistent withdrawal signs for many months. Heroin withdrawal, by itself, is normally not fatal to otherwise healthy adults, but it can cause death to the fetus of a pregnant addict.

Most street heroin is "cut" with other drugs or with substances such as sugar, starch, powdered milk, or quinine. Street heroin also can be cut with strychnine or other poisons. Because heroin abusers do not know the actual strength of the drug or its true contents, they are at risk of overdose or death. Heroin also exposes abusers to special problems from sharing needles or other injection equipment...the transmission of HIV, Hepatitis B and C and other diseases.

Heroin is usually injected, sniffed/snorted, or smoked. Typically, a heroin abuser may inject up to four times a day. Intravenous injection provides the greatest intensity and most rapid onset of euphoria in 7-8 seconds. Intramuscular injection delivers a relatively slow trip to euphoria in 5 to 8 minutes. If the user sniffs or smokes heroin, the desired effects take 10 to 15 minutes. All forms of heroin use are addictive.

Soon after injection or inhalation, heroin crosses the blood-brain barrier. In the brain, it's converted to morphine and binds rapidly to opioid receptors. Abusers typically report feeling a surge of pleasurable sensation - a "rush." The intensity of the rush is a function of how much drug is taken and how rapidly the drug enters the brain and binds to the natural opioid receptors.

Heroin is particularly addictive because it enters the brain so rapidly. With heroin, the rush is usually accompanied by a warm flushing of the skin, dry mouth, and a heavy feeling in the extremities, which may be accompanied by nausea, vomiting, and severe itching.

After the "rush," abusers usually will be drowsy for several hours. Cardiac function slows. Breathing is also severely slowed, sometimes to the point of death. Heroin overdose is a particular risk on the street, where the amount and purity of the drug cannot be accurately known.

Heroin addiction is chronic and relapsing. In addition to the compulsive drug seeking and use, neurochemical and molecular changes happen in the brain. Once they are addicted, the heroin abusers' primary purpose in life becomes seeking and using drugs. The drugs literally change their brains and their behavior.

### **Medical Consequences:**

Chronic heroin injection use has serious medical consequences that include scarred and/or collapsed veins, bacterial infections of the blood vessels and heart valves, abscesses (boils) and other soft-tissue infections, liver or kidney disease. Heroin's depressing effects on respiration creates lung complications (including various types of pneumonia and tuberculosis).

Besides the direct effects of the drug itself, street heroin may have additives that do not readily dissolve when injected and result in clogging the blood vessels that lead to the lungs, liver, kidneys, or brain. This can cause infection or even death of small patches of cells in vital organs. Immune reactions to these or other contaminants can cause arthritis or other rheumatologic problems.

Overdose with opioids is characterized by euphoria, flushing, itching of the skin (particularly with morphine), miosis (pupils of the eye get smaller), drowsiness, decreased respiratory rate and depth, hypotension, bradycardia (an abnormally slow heart rate of less than 60 beats per minute), and decreased body temperature.

Many complications of heroin addiction are related to the unsanitary administration of the drug. Others are due to the basic properties of the drug, overdose, or intoxicated behavior accompanying drug use, like Heroin's depressing effect on the user's central nervous system.

Pulmonary complications, including various types of pneumonia, may result from the poor health condition of the abuser, as well as from heroin's depressing effects on respiration.

Most heroin abusers died with more drugs than heroin alone in their systems, with alcohol detected in 45% of subjects and benzodiazepines in just over a quarter. Both of these drugs act as central nervous system depressants and can enhance and prolong the depressant effects of heroin, which slows down the body's natural rhythms until the final act is death.

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