



Drug Fact Sheet

Heroin

Overview

Heroin is a highly addictive drug and the most rapidly acting of the opiates.

Street names

Big H, Black Tar, Chiva, Hell Dust, Horse, Negra, Smack, Thunder

Looks like

Heroin is typically sold as a white or brownish powder, or as the black sticky substance known on the streets as “black tar heroin.” Although purer heroin is becoming more common, most street heroin is “cut” with other drugs or with substances such as sugar, starch, powdered milk, or quinine.



Methods of abuse

Heroin can be injected, smoked, or sniffed/snorted. High purity heroin is usually snorted or smoked.

Affect on mind

Because it enters the brain so rapidly, heroin is particularly addictive, both psychologically and physically. Heroin abusers report feeling a surge of euphoria or “rush,” followed by a twilight state of sleep and wakefulness.

Affect on body

One of the most significant effects of heroin use is addiction. With regular heroin use, tolerance to the drug develops. Once this happens, the abuser must use more heroin to achieve the same intensity. As higher doses of the drug are used over time, physical dependence and addiction to the drug develop. Physical symptoms of heroin use include: drowsiness, respiratory depression, constricted pupils, nausea, a warm flushing of the skin, dry mouth, and heavy extremities.

Drugs causing similar effects

Other opioids such as OxyContin®, Vicodin®, codeine, morphine, methadone, and fentanyl can cause similar effects as heroin.

Overdose effects

Because heroin abusers do not know the actual strength of the drug or its true contents, they are at a high risk of overdose or death. The effects of a heroin overdose are: slow and shallow breathing, blue lips and fingernails, clammy skin, convulsions, coma, and possible death.

Legal status in the United States

Heroin is a Schedule I substance under the Controlled Substances Act meaning that it has a high potential for abuse, no currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States, and a lack of accepted safety for use under medical supervision.

Common places of origin

Heroin is processed from morphine, a naturally occurring substance extracted from the seed pod of certain varieties of poppy plants grown in: Southeast Asia (Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar (Burma)), Southwest Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan), Mexico, and Colombia. It comes in several forms, the main one being “black tar” from Mexico (found primarily in the western United States) and white heroin from Colombia (primarily sold on the East Coast).