

- **Heroin**

- Heroin is an extremely potent, heavily abused, and highly addictive illegal drug. This drug is derived from morphine, which is used as a therapeutic measure to relieve pain in highly painful situations such as surgery recovery, broken bones, and other traumatic injuries. This drug can vary in color, with the pure form being white and the impure, more common forms varying from white to dark brown, all due to what they are cut with. The substances that heroine can be cut with vary from other drugs or other substances such as quinine or powdered milk. Recently, the form of drug that has been plaguing the United States is referred to as “black tar” heroin. This form has become an issue in recent years due to how cheap it is to produce, utilizing crude methods. Although this product is cheaper, it is just as dangerous and potent as heroin has been in the past. Heroin is usually found being transported in balloons. (cesar)
- **Street Names:** Brown Sugar, Cheese, China White, Dope, H, Horse, Junk, Skag, Skunk, Smack, White Horse (cesar)
- **Uses:** Heroin is most often used intravenously, with users injecting the drug directly into the bloodstream to obtain a quick, potent high. A heroin abuser usually has several items that he/she uses to administer heroin into their bloodstream. Paraphernalia of heroin users usually includes: small cotton balls, spoons/bottle caps, a “tie-off” so a vein is easily punctured, and hypodermic needles. Users can also use heroin by snorting the powder form through their nostril. Some users have taken to doing alternate lines of heroin and cocaine, a method termed “crisscrossing”. Another method that has been used is smoking heroine out of a pipe. A new method recently gaining popularity is spraying liquefied heroin into the nasal cavity is referred to as “shabanging”. The common misconception is that snorting, sniffing, or smoking heroin can be less addictive than injecting; this is not the case, all methods of heroine use are highly addictive. Paraphernalia associated with snorting, sniffing, or smoking heroin include razor blades, straws, pipes, or rolled dollar bills. In a recent study done in Australia, the majority of users have experienced a non-fatal overdose during their time abusing heroin. Signs of overdose include slow and shallow breathing, convulsions, pinpoint pupils, confusion, coma, and death. Someone exhibiting these symptoms should be rushed to the hospital immediately. (cesar)
- **Physical effects:** Depending on the method of administration, heroin users can experience the effects either a few seconds or several minutes after taking the drug. The first physical effect of heroin is a warm flushing of the skin, followed by dry mouth. Once this period passes, the user starts to experience alternating experiences of wakefulness and extreme drowsy states for several hours. Another common side effect is slowing of breathing, in some cases slowed down enough to the point of respiratory failure. Other physical effects include itching, nausea, or vomiting. Overdose, severe addiction, and death may also occur after initial use. (cesar)
- **Psychological Effects:** Heroin acts on naturally occurring opiate receptors in the brain. These receptors are usually associated with naturally occurring substances in the body that act as natural pain killers. Once administered in the body, heroin gives the user a feeling of euphoria, referred to as a “rush”. Once the drug takes the full effect on the body, users often have slowed cloudy mental processes due to the suppressing of the brain’s functions. Other sensations experienced by heroine a user is an irrational heaviness associated with the extremities, often not being able to lift the arms up once intoxicated. (cesar)
- **Long-Term Effects:** As users take heroin more and more often, the first long-term effect experienced is a buildup of tolerance. When this tolerance builds up, a user can spend upwards of \$200 maintaining their addiction and trying to not experience harsh withdrawal effects associated with this drug. Besides the buildup tolerance and high levels of addiction, users can experience a range of health consequences by using heroine extensively. Chronic users often have infections at injection sites, collapsed veins, infections of the heart lining and valves, liver disease, and lung-related complications such as pneumonia. Due to the range of substances that heroin can be cut with, there may be additional complications such as clogging of the veins and arteries, specifically in the lungs, liver, kidneys, and even the brain.

With the use of needles, there also comes the risk of contraction blood-borne pathogens such as Hepatitis B or C, HIV, and Tetanus, among other illnesses. Death and overdose risks also rise exponentially during prolonged use of heroin. (cesar)

- **Withdrawal Effects:** Heroin is not only dangerous while using but it can also be fatal when trying to quit. Heroin is one of several known drugs that can cause death through severe withdrawal side effects. Due to how intense the side-effects are from heroin, many users start utilizing Buprenorphine or Methadone clinics to try and minimize the drug's severe withdrawal symptoms. Although these drugs are a partial relief to these side-effects, many users relapse to heroin use to relieve the painful, flu-like symptoms one can experience when coming off of heroin. In heavy users, the withdrawal symptoms take 2-3 days to peak severity, and take about a week to fully work through the body's system. The side effects experienced by heroin users going through withdrawal start within a few hours of the last dose and include drug craving, restlessness, muscle and bone pain, and vomiting. In some cases death can occur from heroin withdrawal. (cesar)

Source:

Center for Substance Abuse Research [<http://www.cesar.umd.edu>]