

HEROIN

◆ CONCERNING YOUR HEALTH ◆

A DANGEROUSLY POWERFUL AND ADDICTIVE DRUG

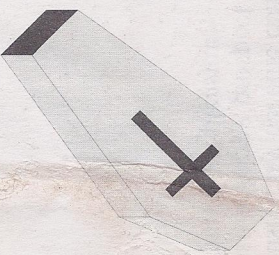
Heroin is one of several powerful drugs made from opium. Opium is made from the juice of opium poppies. When opium juice is dried, it is made into a brownish powder known as raw opium and a yellowish powder called morphine base. The raw opium and morphine base are used to make medicines such as codeine and morphine. Heroin is a semisynthetic narcotic made from morphine base and is also known as "H," "horse," "stuff," and "smack." This illegal drug is much stronger than morphine and is not used as a medicine.

When heroin was first discovered it was prescribed to relieve pain and as a powerful cough suppressant used to treat a variety of other ailments such as bronchitis, emphysema, asthma, and even tuberculosis. The drug was even recommended as a cure for morphine addiction, and it also "cured" a long list of other addictions including opium addiction and alcohol addiction. Obviously, heroin did not "cure" any of these illnesses any more than death cures smoking! It simply replaced these other addictions with a more potent addiction.

Addicts take heroin by sniffing (snorting), by injecting under the skin (skin popping), by injecting into a muscle (muscling), by injecting into a vein (mainlining), and by eating the drug. Mainlining is much more dangerous since it increases the risk of overdosing. Any time a needle is used to inject a drug, the risk of serious infections such as AIDS or hepatitis increases.

THE NATURE OF THE ADDICTION

Heroin users quickly become both physically and psychologically dependent on the drug, and if they quit taking it or cannot get a steady supply, they become violently ill with nausea, chills, sweating, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, runny nose, watering eyes, and muscle cramps. These symptoms usually get worse for about three days, then gradually subside over the next seven to ten days.



When heroin is first taken it provides users with a feeling of extreme calm and well-being. Since heroin is illegal, it is difficult for addicts to find an uninterrupted supply of the drug. Heroin purchased on the street is expensive and the quality is unreliable. Heroin users risk overdose and death if they get an unusually high concentration of the drug in what they think is a normal dose. Many addicts turn to crime and prostitution to get money to pay for their heroin habit.

HEROIN ADDICTION—THE PHYSIOLOGICAL MECHANISM

For years researchers did not understand how heroin and other narcotics work in the human body. But in 1975, researchers discovered that the brain and body have an internal chemical mechanism that is unlocked by heroin and other narcotics. These drugs resemble the keys the body uses to unlock the enkephalins and endorphins, natural defenses of the body which regulate pain, pleasure, and emotion. Once heroin releases the endorphins, the entire body experiences a wave of pleasure and relief from pain that addicts often compare to sexual orgasm. The effect is immediate and lasts up to three to four hours. Once addicted, it is not uncommon for heroin users to literally spend the rest of their lives in pursuit of the drug.

HEROIN USE—THE CONSEQUENCES

Heroin use has taken the lives of many thousands of addicts. Many others end up in prison or with AIDS—risks that many people find unacceptable. But probably the most important reason not to use opiates is that the body develops tolerance for these narcotics and loses sensitivity to the much smaller amounts of the natural enkephalins and endorphins produced by our bodies. Once this threshold is raised, the heroin user experiences almost constant pain—which is only temporarily relieved by more heroin. Eventually, the heroin user may become constantly dependent on heroin just for pain relief, an unhappy prospect for people who have devoted their lives to the pursuit of pleasure!

