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Heroin



What are the street names/slang terms?

Big H, Black tar, Brown sugar, Dope, Horse, Junk, Skag, Smack, China white

What is Heroin?

Heroin is a highly addictive drug derived from morphine, which is obtained from opium poppy plants. It is a “downer” or depressant that affects the brain’s pleasure systems and interferes with the brain’s ability to perceive pain.

What does it look like?

White to dark brown powder or tar-like substance.

How is it used?

Heroin can be used in a variety of ways, depending on user preference and the purity of the drug. Heroin can be injected into a vein (“mainlining”), injected into a muscle, placed on tinfoil and inhaled as smoke through a straw or snorted as powder via the nose.

What are its short-term effects?

The short-term effects of heroin abuse appear soon after a single dose and disappear in a few hours. After an injection of heroin, the user reports feeling a surge of euphoria (“rush”) accompanied by a warm flushing of the skin, a dry mouth, and heavy extremities. Following this initial euphoria, the user goes “on the nod,” an alternately wakeful and drowsy state. Mental functioning becomes clouded due to the depression of the central nervous system. Other effects include vomiting and constipation.

What are its long-term effects?

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, 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. In addition to the effects of the drug itself, street heroin may have additives that do not really dissolve 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. With regular heroin use, tolerance develops. This means the abuser must use more heroin to achieve the same intensity or effect.

As higher doses are used over time, physical dependence and addiction develop. With physical dependence, the body has adapted to the presence of the drug and withdrawal symptoms may occur if use is reduced or stopped. Withdrawal, which in regular abusers may occur as early as a few hours after the last administration, produces drug craving, 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 24 and 48 hours after the last dose and subside after about a week.

Heroin abuse is associated with a number of serious health conditions, including fatal overdose, spontaneous abortion, and infectious diseases like hepatitis and HIV (because these diseases are transmitted through contact with blood or other bodily fluids, which can occur when sharing needles or other injection drug use equipment.) Chronic users may develop collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and valves, abscesses, constipation and gastrointestinal cramping, and liver or kidney disease. Pulmonary complications, including various types of pneumonia, may result from the poor health of the user as well as from heroin’s effects on breathing.

What is its federal classification?

Schedule I

Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA); Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)

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Prescription Opioid Abuse: A First Step to Heroin Use?

Nearly half of young people who inject heroin surveyed in three recent studies reported abusing prescription opioids before starting to use heroin. Some individuals reported taking up heroin because it is cheaper and easier to obtain than prescription opioids. Learn more at [The Medicine Abuse Project](http://medicineabuseproject.org) [<http://medicineabuseproject.org>].

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