

# HEROIN

## WHAT IS IT?

Heroin is a drug made from morphine that quickly enters the brain and affects the pleasure systems to interfere with the ability to feel pain. Heroin can be a white or brown powder or a black sticky substance known as black tar, but both forms bind to opioid receptors to slow the way you think and dull your memory. The strength of heroin varies, making it unpredictable and deadly.

## SHORT TERM EFFECTS

- Rush of pleasure or euphoria
- Dry mouth
- Warm flushing of the skin
- Heavy feeling in the arms and legs
- Nausea and vomiting
- Severe itching
- Clouded mental functioning
- Going “on the nod” — a back and forth state of being conscious and semiconscious

## LONG TERM EFFECTS

- Insomnia
- Collapsed veins for people who inject
- Damaged tissues inside the nose for people who snort
- Infection of the heart lining and valves
- Abscesses
- Constipation and stomach cramping
- Lung, liver and kidney disease
- Mental disorders such as depression
- Sexual dysfunction in males
- Sharing needles increases risk of contracting infectious diseases (HIV, Hepatitis, etc.)

## HEROIN OVERDOSE

Heroin overdoses have increased in recent years. Heroin is a depressant, and when people overdose, their breathing often slows or stops which decreases the amount of oxygen reaching the brain. Low oxygen in the brain can have detrimental effects on the brain and nervous system, including coma and permanent brain damage. Too much heroin also slows heart rate to a dangerously low level which also can result in death.

## HEROIN ADDICTION & OVERDOSE TREATMENT

Heroin is highly addictive. A single dose can cause a person to go down the road of addiction. People who regularly use heroin often develop a tolerance and require more of the drug to get the desired effect, which increases health consequences and risk of overdose. If a person does overdose, Naloxone is a medication that can be administered to block heroin from binding in the brain. However, it is still gravely important to call 911. Naloxone is only active in the body for 30-90 minutes, and it's very possible that it can wear off before the opioid does. Naloxone alone is not enough; you must contact emergency personnel.

## HEROIN WITHDRAWAL

Heroin withdrawal can start as few as 2 hours after last drug use, and symptoms include:

- Restlessness
- Severe muscle and bone pain
- Sleep problems
- Diarrhea and vomiting
- Cold flashes with goose bumps
- Uncontrollable leg movements
- Severe heroin cravings



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