

FACTS ABOUT FENTANYL

WHAT IS FENTANYL

Common medicinal brand names

Actiq, Durogesic and Sublimaze.

Also known as china girl, china white, Bear, dance fever, Goodfella, murder 8, TNT, Tango and cash.

Fentanyl is an opioid drug. A doctor can prescribe it for legal use in the treatment of severe pain. Some people use it illegally for recreational use. It is a powerful synthetic drug, similar to morphine but 80 to 100 times stronger.

EFFECTS OF FENTANYL

Fentanyl comes in the forms of pills, patches, powder, solutions, blotters and sprays. Depending on type, it can be swallowed, snorted, injected or used by placing blotter paper in the mouth where it is absorbed. Some people use fentanyl illegally by extracting it from a patch and injecting it. Some people use it as a cutting agent, mixing it with other illicit substances such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine.

Effects depend on the person (age, weight, size, health and tolerance), as well as the amount taken and if it is used with other drugs, including alcohol. Fentanyl patches take up to a day or two to start working, and are removed after three days. Effects of injecting can be felt immediately and may last 12 to 22 hours. The difference between a safe dose and an overdose is small, making it very easy to overdose on this drug.

Short-term effects, desired or undesired, may include...

- pain relief
- euphoria, relaxed, pleasure, contentment
- dizziness, headache, reduced appetite, itchy, pinpoint pupils
- drowsiness and confusion
- incoherent, slurred speech, impaired balance, shallow breathing

- low blood pressure, slowed heart rate, weakness, fatigue
- mood swings, confusion, irritable, difficulty concentrating
- stomach cramps, wind, nausea, vomiting, constipation and/or diarrhea.

Long-term effects may include...

- reduced sex drive, irregular periods
- long term constipation
- loss of appetite, weight loss, poor nutrition
- skin sores, dental problems
- impaired memory and learning
- difficulty sleeping, heart attack, damage to immune system
- hormonal and reproductive issues in men and women
- anxiety and depression
- fentanyl dependence.

OVERDOSE

Effects from overdosing: rapid and shallow breathing, confusion, fainting, cold and clammy skin, low body temperature, bluish skin and nails, unconsciousness and death.

If a person is experiencing an overdose or is unresponsive call 000 for an ambulance. If unconscious, put them in the recovery position. If not breathing, start CPR. Paramedics won't involve police unless the person is a danger to themselves or others.

HOW LONG DOES FENTANYL STAY IN YOUR SYSTEM?

Fentanyl can be detected up to 2 to 3 days in urine, up to 2 days in blood, and up to 3 months in hair.

TIPS FOR REDUCING RISK

Before: get a prescription from the doctor and follow medical advice. Check with your GP or pharmacist before using other medicines with it, or let your GP know if experiencing negative effects. If taking it for non-medicinal use, tell a friend what you are taking, plan how you are getting home (to avoid driving under the influence) and bring naloxone with you in case of overdose. Injecting is not recommended, though if choosing to inject, get your own clean, sharp syringe and find a clean location.

During: only take the prescribed dose or if using without a prescription, take a low dose and wait to see effects before taking a bit more, don't take too much, too often. Safely dispose of syringes and patches. It is easy to overdose on this drug.

Avoid: mixing fentanyl with other drugs, including alcohol, using more fentanyl patches than what is prescribed, sharing your medication with others, continuing use while experiencing negative effects, applying heat to patches (heat can cause the body to absorb too much – so fevers, heat lamps, saunas, spas, electric blankets or intense exercise can increase risk of overdose).

IS FENTANYL BECOMING A PROBLEM?

It may be a problem if you agree with any of these statements:

- I struggle to limit or reduce the amount of fentanyl I'm taking
- I spend a lot of time taking fentanyl or affected by it
- I often feel strong urges to take fentanyl
- I'm unable to perform tasks at work, school or home due to fentanyl use
- I have developed a tolerance to fentanyl, so I need to have more to feel effects
- I have withdrawal symptoms – sweats and chills, difficulty sleeping, diarrhoea, restless legs, stomach and leg cramps, nausea, shaking, anxiety, runny nose and eyes.

TIPS FOR PROBLEMATIC FENTANYL USE

- seek support from a health professional, as well as from family and friends
- avoid people, places, objects, feelings or situations associated with taking codeine
- start doing activities you enjoy that don't involve taking fentanyl
- look after yourself – get enough sleep, follow a healthy diet, adopt a balanced lifestyle
- set some personal goals.

FENTANYL AND THE LAW

In Australia, it is illegal to use or possess fentanyl without a prescription from a doctor, or to sell or give fentanyl patches to someone else for recreational use.

FOR SUPPORT – CALL DRUG ARM

CALL DRUG ARM CENTRAL INTAKE ON 07 3620 8880 DURING BUSINESS HOURS TO ACCESS FREE SUPPORT OR EMAIL INTAKE@DRUGARM.COM.AU. FOR GENERAL INQUIRIES, CALL 1300 656 800 OR EMAIL INFO@DRUGARM.COM.AU.

FOR 24/7 SUPPORT CALL:

ALCOHOL & DRUG INFORMATION SERVICE: 1800 177 833 (QLD) AND 1800 250 015 (NATIONAL).