

FACTS ABOUT HEROIN

WHAT IS HEROIN

Also known as smack, horse, junk, gear, dynamite, hammer, the dragon, skag, shit, brown, Harry, boy, "H", black, black tar, tar, black pearl, China White, skunk, snow, snowball.

Heroin is a very addictive opioid drug and acts like a depressant. It is made from the sap of the opium poppy. In Australia, heroin can be a fine white powder or granules or tiny rocks, which are normally white, off-white or sometimes brown. It can be mixed with other potentially harmful substances, making it difficult to know the drug's purity.

EFFECTS OF HEROIN

Heroin is usually injected but can be snorted or smoked. It can be mixed with cannabis or crack cocaine. It can be heated and the vapours inhaled. It is often sold in caps – a small amount, or grams, and is usually packaged in foils or in small balloons.

Effects depend on the person (age, weight, size, health and tolerance), as well as the strength, the amount used, and if it is used with other drugs, including alcohol. When smoking or injecting (effects are felt within seconds), snorting (10 to 15 minutes). As it wears off, you may experience "comedown" effects, which can last 2 to 3 days.

Short-term effects, both desired and undesired...

- "rush" of pleasure and pain relief
- feel peaceful, relaxed, detached, comfortable and sleepy
- slow and shallow breathing or dry mouth
- confused and clumsy
- slurred and slow speech
- slower breathing and decreased heart rate
- pinpoint (smaller) pupils
- reduced appetite, nausea and vomiting

- decreased sex drive
- nosebleeds and nasal passage damage (from snorting)
- tetanus, infection, vein damage, Hepatitis B or C, HIV, AIDS (from injecting or sharing needles).

Long-term effects may include...

- intense sadness
- irregular periods and difficult getting pregnant (women)
- problems with sex drive, erectile dysfunction, infertility (men)
- increased risk of overdose
- severe constipation and loss of appetite
- dental issues and skin sores
- problems with heart, liver, brain and lungs
- heroin dependence.

OVERDOSE

Effects from overdosing: difficulty breathing, fingertips or lips turning blue, irregular heartbeat, itchiness, difficulty urinating, cold skin, low blood pressure, stomach spasms, confusion, disorientation, drowsiness, uncontrolled muscle spasms, unconscious, death.

If a person is experiencing an overdose or is unresponsive call 000 for an ambulance. If possible administer naloxone. 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 HEROIN STAY IN YOUR SYSTEM?

Depends on use and person. Generally, effects usually last 3 to 5 hours. Heroin leaves saliva quickly but may be detected up to one hour. It can be detected in urine up to 48 hours, blood up to 6 hours and hair up to 3 months or more.

TIPS FOR REDUCING RISK

There is no safe way to use heroin. There will always be a health risk. The only way to be safe is not to use. If you choose to use, the following will help reduce risk:

Before: take a friend and tell them what you plan on using, plan how to get home (to avoid driving under the influence), use new or clean equipment. Injecting is not recommended, though if choosing to inject, get your own clean, sharp syringe and find a clean location.

During: go slow, start with a low dose then wait to see effects before having a bit more, know and keep to your limits. Safely dispose of syringes.

Avoid: using heroin with other drugs, including alcohol, using too much, too often and needle or equipment sharing. While using don't be alone, don't drive or do risky activities or be responsible for the care of others.

IS HEROIN USE 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 heroin I'm using
- I spend a lot of time using heroin or affected by it
- I often feel strong urges to use heroin
- I'm unable to perform tasks at work or home due to heroin use
- I have developed a tolerance to heroin, so I need to have more to feel effects
- I have withdrawal symptoms – sweating, depression, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, unease, restlessness, hot and cold flushes, runny nose, disrupted sleep, nausea and vomiting.

TIPS FOR PROBLEMATIC HEROIN 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 heroin
- look after yourself – get enough sleep, follow a healthy diet, adopt a balanced lifestyle
- set some personal goals.

HEROIN AND THE LAW

It is against the law to use, possess, make or sell heroin in Australia. In Queensland, it is illegal to possess needles or syringes if they are not disposed of safely and therefore pose a risk to others.

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).