



HEROIN

A factsheet from

DrugWise

Boy, brown, china white, dragon, gear, H, horse, junk, skag, smack, Diamorphine, morphine, methadone, opium, codeine, pethidine, dihydrocodeine (DF118), palfium, Diconal, Temgesic, physeptone

Heroin (medical name diamorphine) is one of a group of drugs called 'opiates' which are made from morphine extracted from the opium poppy.

Street heroin usually comes as an off white or brown powder. It can be smoked ('chasing the dragon'), snorted or prepared for injection. Opioids (synthetic opiates) made for medical use come in tablet or injectable form and may be used for non-medical reasons.

Heroin is a sedative drug that depresses the nervous system, slowing down body functioning and relieving physical and emotional pain. The effect is usually to give a feeling of warmth, relaxation and detachment with a lessening of anxiety. Higher doses can cause sedation and even death from respiratory failure.

Withdrawal after regular use can produce flu like symptoms that may include aches, tremor, sweating, chills and muscular spasms. These fade after 7-10 days but feelings of being weak and unwell may last longer.

Whilst many people do successfully give up long term heroin use, coming off and staying off can be very difficult.

Injecting heroin and sharing injecting equipment runs the risk of catching and spreading a virus such as HIV or hepatitis B and C. There is also the risk that veins may be damaged and that an abscess or blood clot may develop. Using clean needles such as from a needle exchange scheme can help prevent problems.



The law

Heroin is a class A drug, so it's illegal to possess, give away or sell. Possessing heroin can lead to seven years in jail and/or an unlimited fine. Supplying heroin can lead to life imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. In practice maximum sentences are unlikely to be applied.

Prevalence

According to Home Office statistics published in 2016, heroin use amongst 16-59 year olds was 0.1%. The percentage using methadone (an opiate taken to help people come off heroin) was also 0.1%. The proportion of 16-24 year olds reporting heroin use was nearer 0%. This figure for 16-24 year olds is a slight reduction on previous years.



Naloxone

Naloxone is a life-saving emergency antidote which reverses the effects of an overdose. Local services can make naloxone available, alongside easy to understand training on how to use it, so that it can be supplied to people who might need it, such as drug users, their family and friends.

If you think someone has overdosed, call an ambulance straight away.