
THE TRUTH ABOUT
HEROIN
Smack
Skag
H
Junk
Horse
drugfreeworld.org

WHY THIS BOOKLET WAS PRODUCED

You hear a lot of talk about drugs these days—at school, in the streets, on the internet and TV. Some of it is true, some not.

What you may not know is that much of what you hear about drugs actually comes from those selling them. Former dealers have said they would tell people anything to get them to buy drugs.

You need the real facts and the truth about drugs so you can make an informed decision about them. That is why we have prepared this booklet—for you.

Your feedback is important to us, so let us know what you think about this booklet. Visit us at **DrugFreeWorld.org** and email us at **info@drugfreeworld.org**.

HEROIN: WHAT IS IT?

Heroin is a highly addictive illegal drug. Millions of addicts around the world are unable to overcome the urge to use it every day—knowing they will face the horrors of withdrawal if they stop.

Heroin, like opium and morphine, is made from the resin of poppy plants. Milky, sap-like opium is first removed from the poppy pod, then refined to make morphine and further processed into heroin.

Most heroin is injected, adding risks such as contracting HIV or AIDS, hepatitis B, hepatitis C or other infections in addition to the pain of addiction.


Heroin cut me off from the rest of the world. My parents kicked me out. My friends and my brothers didn't want to see me anymore. I WAS ALL ALONE."
—Suzanne

THE ORIGINS OF HEROIN

Heroin was first manufactured in 1898 by the German pharmaceutical company Bayer. It was originally marketed as a treatment for tuberculosis and a remedy for morphine addiction.

A VICIOUS CIRCLE

In the 1850s, opium addiction was a major problem in the United States. The "solution" was to replace opium with a less potent and supposedly nonaddictive substitute—morphine. However, morphine addiction soon became an even bigger issue.



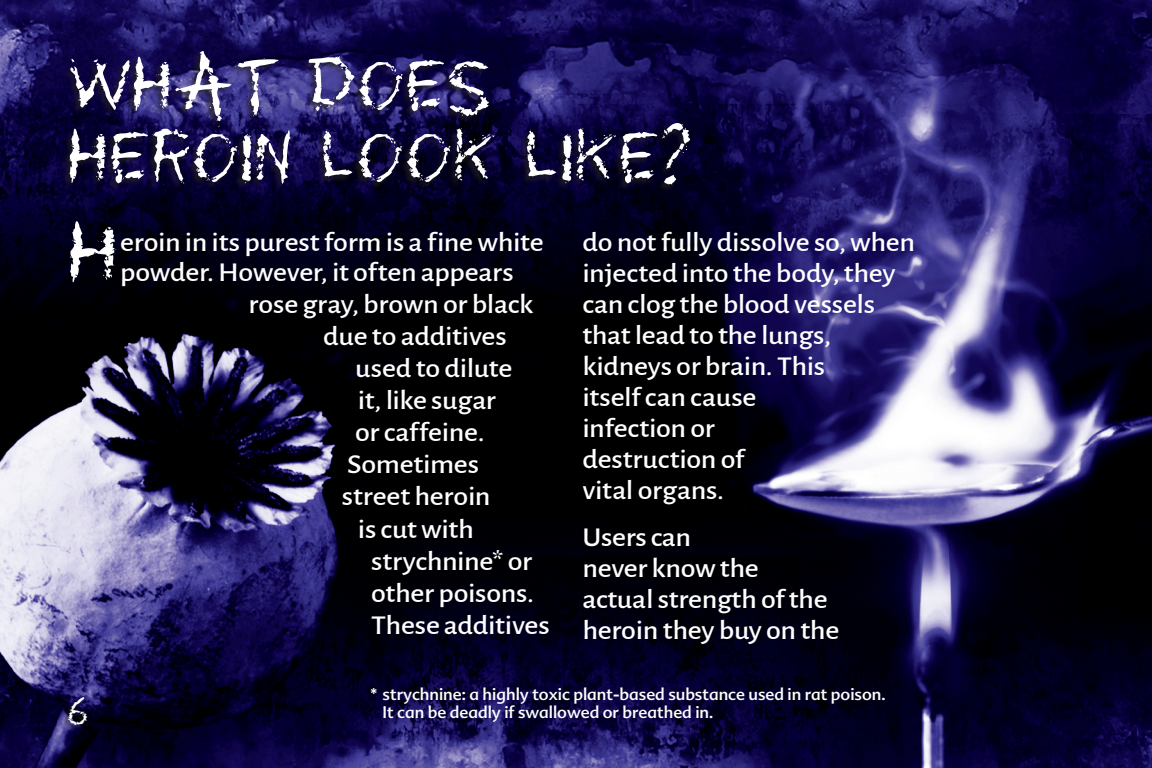
The next substitute drug was heroin, which turned out to be even more addictive than morphine. With the heroin problem came yet another "nonaddictive" substitute—the drug now known as *methadone*. First developed in 1937 by German scientists searching for a surgical painkiller, methadone was exported to the US under the trade name Dolophine in 1947. Renamed methadone, the drug was soon being widely used as a treatment for heroin addiction. Unfortunately, it proved to be even more addictive than heroin.

Today, heroin remains a global problem. In the United States alone, it claims some 20 lives every single day.

WHAT DOES HEROIN LOOK LIKE?

Heroin in its purest form is a fine white powder. However, it often appears rose gray, brown or black due to additives used to dilute it, like sugar or caffeine. Sometimes street heroin is cut with strychnine* or other poisons. These additives do not fully dissolve so, when injected into the body, they can clog the blood vessels that lead to the lungs, kidneys or brain. This itself can cause infection or destruction of vital organs.

Users can never know the actual strength of the heroin they buy on the



* strychnine: a highly toxic plant-based substance used in rat poison. It can be deadly if swallowed or breathed in.

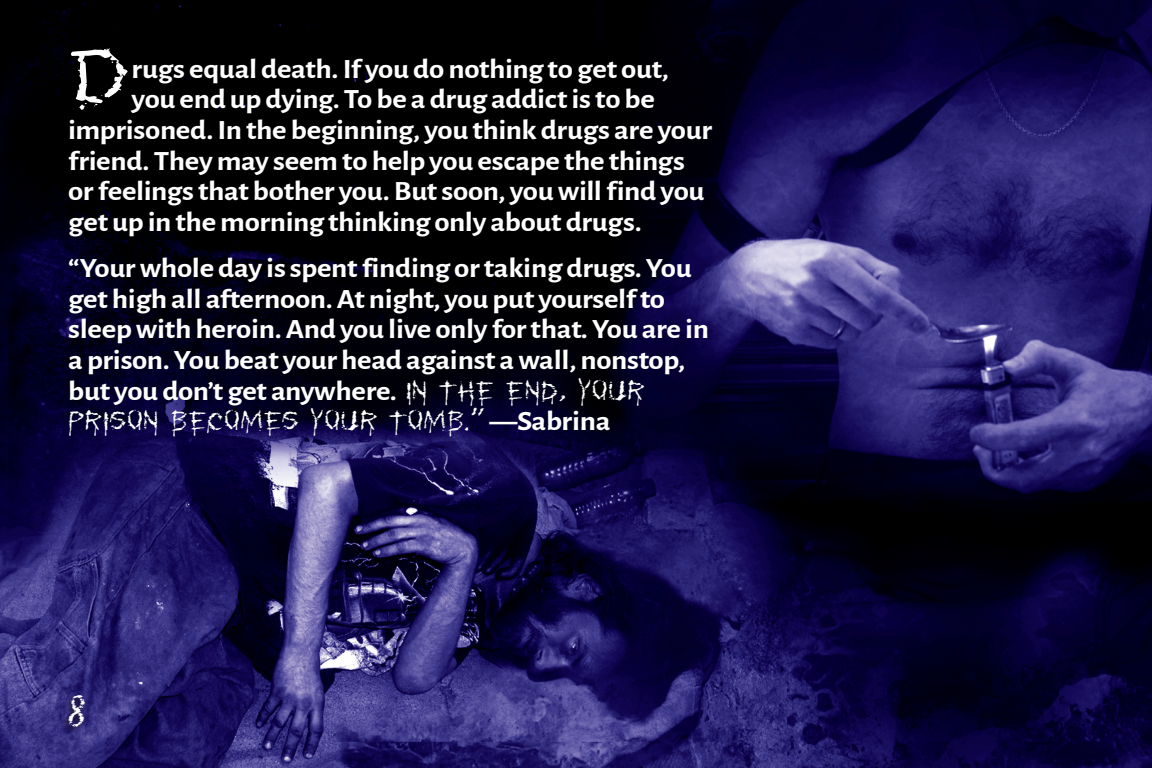
street, putting them at constant risk of an overdose.

Heroin can be injected, smoked or snorted. Heroin may initially create a false sense of extroversion and heightened sexual performance. However, these effects fade quickly, and users often seek more of the drug, chasing a high they will never feel again.

Heroin is highly addictive. Even using it once can cause cravings and painful withdrawal. The drug quickly breaks down the immune system. Prolonged use often brings on severe physical and mental decline and, tragically, death.

STREET NAMES for HEROIN

- Big H
- Brown Sugar
- H
- Hell Dust
- Horse
- Junk
- Nose Drops
- Skag
- Smack
- Thunder



Drugs equal death. If you do nothing to get out, you end up dying. To be a drug addict is to be imprisoned. In the beginning, you think drugs are your friend. They may seem to help you escape the things or feelings that bother you. But soon, you will find you get up in the morning thinking only about drugs.

"Your whole day is spent finding or taking drugs. You get high all afternoon. At night, you put yourself to sleep with heroin. And you live only for that. You are in a prison. You beat your head against a wall, nonstop, but you don't get anywhere. IN THE END, YOUR PRISON BECOMES YOUR TOMB." —Sabrina

THE DESTRUCTIVE EFFECTS OF HEROIN

IMMEDIATE HARM: Heroin produces an intense sensation called a *rush*, often accompanied by warm skin and a dry mouth. Initial side effects may include vomiting or severe itching.

After the high, users become drowsy for hours as their breathing and heart rate slow down.

Within hours after the drug effects have decreased, the user's body will begin to crave more. If he does not get another fix, he will begin to experience withdrawal. Withdrawal includes the extreme physical and mental symptoms that are experienced if the body is not supplied again with the next dose of heroin. These symptoms include restlessness, aches and pains in the bones, diarrhea, vomiting and severe discomfort.

The initial high lasts only a few minutes but, over time, users need larger doses just to feel "normal."

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

- **Rush**
- **Slowed breathing**
- **Clouded mental functioning**
- **Nausea and vomiting**
- **Sedation (drowsiness)**
- **Hypothermia (body temperature lower than normal)**
- **Coma or death**

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

The effects on the body from continued use of this drug are devastating. Frequent injections can cause collapsed veins and lead to infection of the blood vessels and heart valves. Tuberculosis* can result from the general poor condition of the body. Arthritis is another long-term result of heroin addiction.

One element of a heroin addict's lifestyle is sharing needles with other addicts—which can lead to HIV, AIDS or other contagious infections. It is estimated that, of the 35,000 new hepatitis C2 (a specific type of liver disease) infections each year in the United States, over 70 percent are from drug users who use needles.

"People believe that heroin is super, but you lose everything: job, parents, friends, confidence, your home. Lying and stealing become a habit. You no longer respect anyone or anything."
—Pete



Heroin withdrawal is a terrifying experience that begins to torture the user within hours of the last fix.

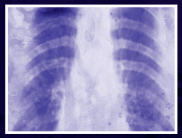
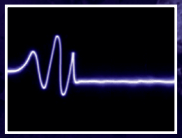
* tuberculosis: an infectious disease affecting the lungs and other organs

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

- Bad teeth
- Inflammation of the gums
- Constipation
- Cold sweats
- Itching
- Weakening of the immune system
- Coma
- Respiratory illnesses
- Muscular weakness, partial paralysis
- Reduced sexual capacity and long-term impotence in men
- Menstrual disturbance in women
- Inability to achieve orgasm (women and men)
- Loss of memory and intellectual performance
- Introversion
- Depression
- Pustules on the face
- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia

Abscesses from use of needles pockmark the body of a 16-year-old addict



HEROIN ABUSE brings about physical and mental destruction.

"I'LL JUST TRY IT ONCE."

WARNING: EVEN A SINGLE DOSE OF HEROIN CAN START A PERSON ON THE ROAD TO ADDICTION.

Many people experiment with heroin, thinking, "I'll try it once or twice. I can always stop." But those who start down that road find it nearly impossible to turn back. Consider the words of Sam, a 15-year-old addict: "When you first shoot up, you will most likely puke and feel repelled, but soon you'll try it again. It will cling to you like an obsessed lover. The rush of the hit and the way you'll want more, as if you were being deprived of air—that's how it will trap you."

The threat of addiction is not the worst consequence of experimenting with heroin. Jim was 21 years old and usually spent his evenings drinking beer with friends. He had already experimented with heroin so, when friends offered him a line to snort, he accepted. Fifteen minutes after inhaling, he passed out, then dropped into a deep coma, which lasted more than two months. Today, he is confined to a wheelchair, unable to write and barely able to read. Whatever dreams and aspirations he once had are gone.



THE HEROIN LOOK

Some magazines and fashion trends have promoted a "heroin chic" look: pale complexion, dark circles under the eyes, sunken cheeks and extreme thinness.

Just as rock stars helped popularize LSD during the 1960s, so have some of today's fashion designers, photographers and advertising people influenced an entire generation of youth by portraying heroin use in magazines and music videos as fashionable and even desirable.

This glamorizes heroin use, ignoring the devastating realities. Fashion photographer Davide Sorrenti (right), whose work was synonymous with "heroin chic," tragically died from a heroin overdose at age 20.



A VERY SLIPPERY SLOPE

Teens often begin with substances like cigarettes or alcohol. By high school graduation, nearly half of all teens will have tried marijuana, once mistakenly thought to be nonaddictive. For some, this leads to experimenting with stronger, more addictive drugs like heroin.

All teens who smoke marijuana today will not become heroin addicts tomorrow. But the danger does exist. And long-term studies of high school students show that few young people use other drugs without first having tried marijuana. Once a person builds up a tolerance and can no longer get the initial rush he seeks, he can begin increasing drug consumption or looking for something stronger.

LET'S FACE REALITY

Young people today have a great likelihood of coming into contact with illegal drugs.

The Monitoring the Future survey found that around 27 percent of youths aged 12 to 17 in the US had used an illegal drug in the past year. Marijuana use among college-aged young adults is at an all-time high, with almost half having used it in the past year. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, in 2019 an estimated 31 million people worldwide used opiates, opium and heroin in the prior year.

THE NEW FACE OF HEROIN

The stereotypical image of a listless young heroin addict collapsed in a filthy, dark inner-city alley is obsolete. Today, many heroin addicts are in their late 20s living outside large urban areas and initially abused prescription painkillers. Studies consistently show a link between abuse of prescription painkillers (such as OxyContin) and the use of heroin.

In the early 2000s, higher purity heroin became available on the streets. Because the heroin was cheaper than buying opioid pills, many painkiller addicts switched to heroin. At which point, another deadly trend emerged: to increase the potency of heroin, dealers started adding fentanyl—a deadly mix which resulted in an unprecedented increase in overdose deaths.



From the day I started using, I never stopped. Within one week, I had gone from snorting heroin to shooting it. Within one month, I was addicted and going through all my money. I sold everything of value that I owned and eventually everything that my mother owned. Within one year, I had lost everything.

"I SOLD MY CAR, LOST MY JOB, WAS KICKED OUT OF MY MOTHER'S HOUSE, WAS $25,000 IN CREDIT CARD DEBT and living on the streets of Camden, New Jersey. I lied, I stole, I cheated.

"I was raped, beaten, mugged, robbed, arrested, homeless, sick and desperate. I knew that nobody could have a lifestyle like that very long, and I knew that death was imminent. If anything, death was better than a life as a junkie." —Alison

INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS

Nearly 62 million people in the world used opioids* in a year, half of whom used heroin or opium.

- Afghanistan produces 85 percent of the world's opium, fueling a heroin market worth an estimated $55 billion.
- The National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that in a single year 745,000 Americans used heroin.
- Overdose deaths in the United States involving heroin totaled over 14,000 in a 12-month period.
- Opioids, including heroin, were involved in three of every four drug overdose deaths in Europe, according to a report from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.
- In the United States, more than 500,000 people are addicted to heroin.



* opioids: a broad term that encompasses natural opium, as well as natural and synthetic opium-like substances

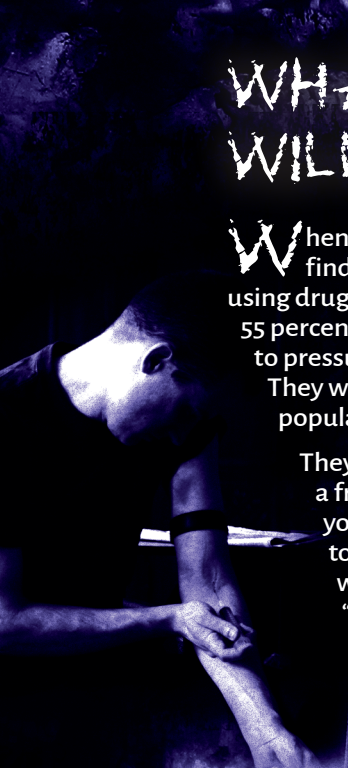


HEROIN COMBINED WITH...

Cheese heroin is a blend of black tar Mexican heroin (called *black tar* because of its color) and over-the-counter cold medication. The drug costs only a few dollars a hit. Cheese heroin users as young as nine have been rushed to hospital emergency rooms for heroin withdrawal.

A *speedball* (or *powerball*) combines heroin and cocaine or heroin and methamphetamine. As heroin is a depressant and cocaine and meth are stimulants, taking them creates a potentially lethal push-pull effect on the body and brain. The combination of heroin with cocaine and fentanyl is known as a *super speedball*.

WHAT DEALERS WILL TELL YOU



When teens were surveyed to find out why they started using drugs in the first place, 55 percent replied that it was due to pressure from their friends. They wanted to be cool and popular. Dealers know this.

They will approach you as a friend and offer to "help you out" with "something to bring you up." The drug will "help you fit in" or "make you cool."

Drug dealers, motivated by the money they make, will say anything to get you to buy their drugs. They will tell you that "heroin is like a warm blanket" or "heroin will be your best high."

They don't care if the drugs ruin your life as long as they get paid. All they care about is money. Former dealers admit they viewed buyers as "pawns in a chess game."

Get the facts about drugs.
Make your own decisions.

The Truth About Drugs

Drugs are essentially poisons. The amount taken determines the effect.

A small amount acts as a stimulant (speeds you up). A greater amount acts as a sedative (slows you down). An even larger amount poisons and can kill.

This is true of any drug. Only the amount needed to achieve the effect differs.

But many drugs have another liability: they directly affect the mind. They can distort the user's perception of what is happening around him or her. As a result, the person's actions may be odd, irrational, inappropriate and even destructive.

Drugs block off all sensations, the desirable ones along with the undesirable. So, while providing short-term help in the relief of pain, they also wipe out ability and alertness and muddy one's thinking.

Medicines are drugs that are intended to speed up, slow down or change something about the way your body is working to try to make it work better. Sometimes they are necessary. But they are still drugs: they act as stimulants or sedatives, and too much can kill you. So if you do not use medicines as they are supposed to be used, they can be as dangerous as illegal drugs.

The real answer is to get the facts and to not take drugs in the first place.



WHY DO PEOPLE TAKE DRUGS?

People take drugs because they want to change something in their lives.

Here are some of the reasons young people have given for taking drugs:

- To fit in
- To escape or relax
- To relieve boredom
- To seem grown-up
- To rebel
- To experiment

They think drugs are a solution. But eventually, drugs become the problem.

Difficult as it may be to face one's problems, the consequences of drug use are always worse than the problem one is trying to solve with them. The real answer is to get the facts and to not take drugs in the first place.



Millions of copies of booklets such as this have been distributed to people around the world in over 20 languages.



As new drugs appear on the streets and more information about their effects becomes known, existing booklets are updated and new ones created.

The booklets are published by the Foundation for a Drug-Free World, a nonprofit public benefit organization headquartered in Los Angeles, California.

The foundation provides educational materials, advice and coordination for its international drug prevention network. It works with youth, parents, educators, volunteer organizations and government agencies—anyone with an interest in helping people lead lives free from drug abuse.

REFERENCES:

For the references used to compile this booklet, go to DrugFreeWorld.org/refs.

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FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

This booklet is one in a series of publications that covers the facts about marijuana, alcohol, fentanyl, synthetic drugs, Ecstasy, cocaine, crack cocaine, crystal meth and methamphetamine, inhalants, heroin, LSD and prescription drug abuse. Armed with this information, the reader can make the decision to live a drug-free life.

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