

Heroin



Contact Us

Please contact us for further information.

Centre for Student Development and Counselling

416-979-5195

www.ryerson.ca/counselling

Authors: Josiah Keppy, Tonia Walsh, Octavia Bryce, Charlette James, Shereese Maragh, Niyat Mehari, Kauthar Rifi

Series Editors: Kelly McShane, Amy Brown Bowers, Amelia Usher



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Department of Psychology



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Everyone Makes a Mark

What is Heroin?

Heroin is a highly addictive drug made from the poppy plant, *Papaver somniferum*, is considered an opioid. Heroin was used for pain relief. It is made from morphine that has been processed and given a stronger and more immediate high. It comes in white, beige or a brown powdered form that is mixed with water and injected into the vein with a needle, to give a quick high. It can also be snorted. Physical and psychological dependence to heroin can occur within 2 to 3 weeks.

Prevalence

The amount of heroin use has actually decreased since 2004, from 11.3% to 7.0% (Stats Canada). One study (Fischer et al, 2008) found that users of prescription opioids frequently also used heroin.

- In 2004, 1.4% of youth, ages 25 to 29 years old, reported lifetime use of heroin
- In a survey conducted across Canada in 2003, approximately 26% of street youth having injected drugs had taken heroin during a 3-month period. Smoking and snorting of Heroin increased in 2006 due to the increased availability of the drug
- In 2004, 0.9% of Canadians aged 15 and older have used heroin at least once in their lifetime
- Male teens aged 15 and older (1.3%) were found to use heroin more than female teens of the same age group (0.5%)

Consequences of Misuse

It all begins with the material costs. You will lose money and responsibilities, including your bills, education, family, and friends. Furthermore, it can affect your thoughts. You may actually become obsessed with overdose and death. Even then, your addiction will not protect you from going to jail, and actually increases the chance of going to jail.

Effect of Heroin

When heroin is injected it has an intense rush or high, and then there is a period of sedation.

- Pin point pupils
- Itchiness and sweating
- Decreased rate of breathing
- Low blood pressure

Regular use results in

- Constipation
- Loss of sexual interest
- Irregular menstrual cycle
- Changes in mood: docile during use; irritable and aggressive during withdrawal

Risk Factors

- Sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis C (mainly through needle use)
- Death (overdose)

Strong Withdrawal

Heroin is known for the strong withdrawal effects after the high has worn off, sometimes this is only 6 to 12 hours after use. Then, people need to use heroin again in order to get rid of the withdrawal effects (runny nose, sneezing, diarrhea, vomiting, dizziness, craving, goosebumps, leg jerking movements).

Treatment

Many clinics offer different treatment options for you.

These include:

- Individual counselling and detoxification
- Methadone maintenance
- Residential treatment
- Self-help groups
- Day treatment
- Group therapy
- Doctor prescribed detox kits
- Institutional treatment

Keep in mind, even with treatment 82% of users go back to heroin. But with support from your peers and a lot of willpower, anyone can kick the habit.

Medical Support

One of the most common ways to treat heroin addiction is through the use of methadone. Methadone is a prescription drug known to decrease heroin use by preventing symptoms of withdrawal and decreasing heroin cravings.

Environmental Support:

Youth using heroin need the support of family and friends in a healthy drug free environment, in order to overcome their addiction. Supportive environments include treatment facilities, rehab centres, and anonymous support groups.

Psychosocial Support

Treatments include social, behavioural and motivational support. The aim of this intervention is to change the individual's overall mindset and coping strategies to reduce drug use and prevent drug relapse. Psychosocial treatments can be individual or group based, and encourages the active participation of family members. Family members can also receive therapy if needed.