

A woman with dark hair, wearing a bright red hooded jacket, looks directly at the camera with a serious expression. In the foreground, a hand in a white ribbed sweater holds a clear syringe with a needle. The background is a blurred, light-colored wall.

HEROIN ABUSE



A common pattern has been leading people to abusing heroin. It's one that we often see here at Narconon Fresh Start. It usually starts with a prescription for painkillers from the doctor for an injury or pain and then within a short period of time, the person gets addicted and doesn't even know it until he or she can't get anymore prescriptions filled. Then they'll get pills from a friend or start buying them from someone off of the streets. Eventually they're unable to get anymore painkillers or they can't afford their painkiller habit and he or she starts using heroin because it's cheaper.



AN INCREASE IN HEROIN ABUSE

This is the same problem that occurred on a broader scale across America when there was a regulation change on how painkillers were to be prescribed in order to bring down the overdose and addiction rate. Drug manufactures also reformulated some of the pain meds so that users couldn't crush the pills to snort or inject them which was an effort to join the fight. Although there was some victory in bringing down the overdose and addiction rate, the use of heroin almost doubled.

People who were addicted to their pain meds began using heroin because they were unable to continue abusing their painkillers. This is true with the majority of heroin users. They first start off taking prescription drugs and then make the switch to heroin.

HEROIN ADDICTION

Heroin is very addictive and some users have even said they were hooked after their first try. As heroin users continue to use, they develop a tolerance and must use more to continue to get the same effect. The heroin user then develops an addiction and becomes physically dependent and will experience heroin withdrawal symptoms if he or she runs out of their supply or tries to stop using.



HEROIN WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Agitation
- Muscle aches
- Cold sweats
- Hot flashes
- Nausea
- Stomach cramps
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting

DANGERS OF HEROIN ABUSE

Heroin has become more potent in the US which has lead to more heroin overdoses and deaths. Some batches are being laced with fentanyl which is a synthetic anesthetic that is 30-50 times stronger than heroin. It can kill you just by touching the pure form of it.

Heroin users who aren't accustomed to abusing a high potency of heroin may use his or her normal dose and end up overdosing or dying. One in 10 heroin overdoses end in death.

When a person uses heroin, the body feels extremely relaxed and doesn't feel much pain. If you take too much, you fall asleep. Your body naturally remembers to breath whenever you sleep, but a heroin overdose can essentially make your body forget to breath and so you die.



HEROIN'S DAMAGING EFFECTS TO THE LUNGS

Heroin users can develop pulmonary edema of the lungs. This is when fluid is collected in the lungs and makes it difficult to breath causing respiratory failure.

Pneumonia, lung abscesses, tuberculosis and scarred air passages are other damaging effects that heroin can have on the lungs. Pus can even begin to build up between the lung and chest wall which is known as empyema.

These conditions usually go unnoticed and untreated and get worse because of the pain-deadening effect of heroin use.

HEROIN'S DAMAGING EFFECTS TO THE HEART

Many heroin addicts suffer from irregular heart beats because of an inflammation in the heart or because fibrous or fatty tissue replaces the electrical controls of the heart.



An infection known as bacterial endocarditis can develop in a heroin addict's heart. This bacteria comes from unsterile needles or from the cotton which results in tissue death. Clumps of bacteria can grow around the heart valves and may need to be replaced with artificial valves in order to save the life of the user.

HEROIN ABUSE CAN CAUSE BRAIN DAMAGE

A lack of oxygen to the brain from a heroin overdose can cause brain or organ damage. Early stages of Alzheimer's were found in the brain of some heroin addicts according to autopsies from the University of Edinburgh. Other autopsy studies showed a deterioration and spongy state of the brain.





HOW HEROIN AFFECTS THE INTESTINES

Heroin use causes the muscles in the intestines to not work properly. Constipation is a common problem in heroin users and can lead to hemorrhoids or other damage to the rectum and anal area that may need surgery. Bowel movements stop and can cause the intestines to rupture which can cause a life-threatening infection.

HEROIN ABUSE INCREASES THE RISK OF CONTRACTING HEPATITIS B & C AND HIV/AIDS

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SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HEROIN ABUSE

As mentioned earlier, heroin users may start off taking prescription painkillers. Painkillers can have signs similar to heroin abuse.

- Going from excited and active to fatigue
- Nodding off or sleepiness
- Disoriented or confused
- Drop in responsibilities or activities
- Track marks or sores and scabs
- Constantly covering the arms and legs
- Runny or irritated nose
- Loss in weight
- Taking money and stealing items

Findings of spoons, syringes, water pipes, small plastic baggies or wrappers can also be a sign of heroin use.

HOW TO HELP A LOVED ONE STRUGGLING WITH HEROIN ABUSE

It's important to seek help immediately if you suspect that your loved one is abusing heroin or any other drug. Some heroin or drug addicts will say that they can quit on their own or say that they're ready to get help, but then it never happens.

Call a Narconon Fresh Start drug rehab specialist at [855-734-2223](tel:855-734-2223) to get assistance with getting a loved one into drug rehab. We have helped many heroin addicts get off heroin for good and return to living a happier and productive life.





DRUG ABUSE HELP LINE
1-855-734-2223

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE
NARCONON FRESH START PROGRAM

www.freshstart.net