

Tips for Teens: Heroin: The Truth About Heroin

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Tips for Teens: Heroin

The Truth About Heroin

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Slang—Smack, Horse, Mud, Brown Sugar, Junk, Black Tar, Big H, Dope, Skag

Get the Facts...

Heroin affects your brain. Heroin enters the brain quickly. It slows down the way you think, slows down reaction time, and slows down memory. This affects the way you act and make decisions.

Heroin affects your body. Heroin poses special problems for those who inject it because of the risks of HIV, hepatitis B and C, and other diseases that can occur from sharing needles. These health problems can be passed on to sexual partners and newborns.¹

Heroin is super-addictive. Heroin is highly addictive because it enters the brain so rapidly. It particularly affects those regions of the brain responsible for producing physical dependence.

Heroin is not what it may seem. Despite the glamorization of “heroin chic” in films, fashion, and music, heroin use can have tragic consequences that extend far beyond its users. Fetal effects, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, violence, and crime are all linked to its use.

Heroin can kill you. Heroin is one of the most frequently reported drugs by medical examiners in drug abuse deaths.²

Before You Risk It...

Know the law. Heroin is an illegal Schedule I drug, meaning that it is in the group of the most highly addictive drugs.

Get the facts. Any method of heroin use—snorting, smoking, swallowing, or injecting the drug—can cause immediate harm and lead to addiction.

Stay informed. The untimely deaths of several popular musicians and other celebrities may have influenced many young people to stay away from heroin use, but to others, the dangers are still not clear. The average age of first use was 20.7 in 2006.³

Know the risks. Because the strength of heroin varies and its impact is more unpredictable when used with alcohol or other drugs, the user never knows what might happen with the next dose.

Look around you. The vast majority of teens are not using heroin. According to a 2006 national study, less than 1 percent report ever having tried it.⁴

Know the Signs...

How can you tell if a friend is using heroin?

Signs and symptoms of heroin use are:

- Euphoria
- Drowsiness
- Impaired mental functioning
- Slowed down respiration
- Constricted pupils

Signs of a heroin overdose include:

- Shallow breathing
- Pinpoint pupils
- Clammy skin
- Convulsions
- Coma

What can you do to help a friend who is using heroin? Be a real friend. You might even save a life. Encourage your friend to stop or seek professional help. For information and referrals, call the SAMHSA's Health Information Network at 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727).

For more information or for references to facts found in this *Tips for Teens*, go to www.samhsa.gov/SHIN.

Q & A

Q. Isn't heroin a less dangerous drug if you snort or smoke it instead of injecting it?

A. No. Heroin is heroin. There is no safe way of ingesting it. You can still die from an overdose or become addicted by snorting or smoking it.

Q. Can withdrawal from heroin kill you?

A. Although it is seldom fatal, withdrawal from heroin produces drug cravings, restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, and other symptoms that usually last about a week, but may last for many months.

Q. Will heroin use alter my brain?

A. Yes. Heroin enters the neurons or cells of the brain and changes the speed of the chemicals in the brain. It not only affects your brain physically, but also affects the way you think.

Info

To learn more about heroin or obtain referrals to programs in your community, contact one of the following toll-free numbers:

SAMHSA's Health Information Network

1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

(English and Spanish)

TTY 1-800-487-4889

The bottom line: If you know someone who uses heroin, urge him or her to stop or get help. If you use heroin—stop! The longer you ignore the real facts, the more chances you take with your life. It's never too late. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust.

Do it today!

Curious about the TV ads of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign? Check out the Web site at www.freevibe.com or visit the Office of National Drug Control Policy Web site at www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov.