

## How is heroin taken?

Heroin is made from poppies. On the street, it comes in a powder or tar form that is nearly always “cut” or diluted for sale. It may be cut with sugar, starch, talcum powder, flour, powdered milk or similar substances. The color varies, but it may range from white to dark brown; the taste is bitter. It is sold in plastic disposable bags.

Heroin can be taken in many ways – it may be snorted, smoked, injected or swallowed. Most often, it is injected by mixing heroin powder with water which is then injected subcutaneously (under the skin) or intravenously (into a vein). Injection is actually less expensive, because it takes a smaller amount to get the same high. Injection also is said to provide a more intense effect.

## How does it feel to take heroin?

Heroin produces a “rush” of euphoria and a warm, drowsy, contented feeling, dry mouth, warm flushing of the skin, vomiting and heavy extremities. Following this initial euphoria, the user may nod, an alternately wakeful and drowsy state. Mental functioning becomes clouded due to the depression of the central nervous system.

Users may have constricted eye pupils under the influence and want to sleep a lot. Tolerance to heroin builds quickly and more and more is required to get the same effect. It is extremely addictive. Heroin withdrawal is characterized by nausea, aches, chills, sweats, tremors, muscle spasms, diarrhea and enlarged pupils.

## Warning Signs

One of the first signs of substance abuse in young people is deterioration in school or work performance.

There may be a change in personality – a previously engaged and happy person becomes withdrawn, irritable, or angry. Changes in sleeping habits are common. Excess sleeping, drowsiness or a lot of napping are definitely red flags.

## Common Mistakes

- **Rescuing:**

Don't make excuses for the addict. When you make excuses, you cover up the addict's behavior. You're saving the addict from natural consequences. For anyone to get help, they have to be confronted by the consequences. Rescuing is enabling.

- **Ignoring:**

An addict will have mood swings and inappropriate behavior. They can be threatening and violent. If you ignore this behavior they'll continue the abuse, and it gets worse. Confront them. Call the police if you have to. Give them a 'wake-up call'. You are not accepting this, and you are NEVER entitled to be abused.

- **Money:**

Providing money for drugs or financial assistance is NOT preventing the addict from stealing or other crimes. By giving them money, you are sending the message that you accept their addiction. You have to make it difficult for them. Stand firm. Tell them you love them, but under no circumstance will you give them money until they decide to get help.

## How can I help?

- **Seek Help For Yourself**

You and other family members need and deserve information, education, help and support in finding healthy ways to overcome the negative effects of the disease.

- **Learn What Services & Options Are Available**

Treatment programs, counseling, mutual aid/support groups are all options for getting help. Only the person using can make the decision to get help, but you can help create the conditions to make that decision more attractive. Seeking information and support on your own can encourage interest in treatment or self-help.

- **Set Limits**

Actions speak louder than words. Threats are useless against the disease of addiction, so avoid making them.

- **Avoid Common Mistakes**

Rescuing/Accommodating  
Ignoring the problem  
Giving Money  
Preaching/Lecturing/Threatening

- **Make Informed Decisions**

Don't make decisions based on feeling sorry for the addict. A person who is living with an addiction will use feelings of pity to his/her advantage.

## **OVERDOSE IS MOST COMMON:**

- When tolerance has decreased due to a period of not using heroin, methadone or other drugs (jail, detox, hospital).
- When drugs are mixed, especially heroin with other depressants, such as alcohol and benzos (Xanax, Valium, Klonopin, Ativan).
- When using alone. No one is around to help.

## **WARNING SIGNS OF OVERDOSE:**

- Can't be awakened by noise or pain.
- Blue or ash lips & fingernails.
- Slow, shallow breathing. (Less than 1 breath every 5 seconds).
- Gasping or gurgling.
- Vomiting

## **DRUG TOLERANCE**

Tolerance is your body's ability to process a certain amount of a drug. Low tolerance means that your body can only process a small amount of a drug (it takes less feel the effects) and increased tolerance means your body has learned how to process increased amounts of the drug (it takes more to feel effects).

Most importantly, tolerance can decrease rapidly when someone has taken a break from using a drug— for example, while in drug treatment or detox – or unintentionally – for example, while in jail or the hospital, leaving them vulnerable to an overdose.

## **Resource Contacts:**

24 Hour Contacts:  
**9-1-1**

**Suicide Prevention Lifeline**  
1-800-273-8255

**Pretera Center Crisis Hotline**  
1-800-642-3434

**WV 211 Hotline: Dial 2-1-1**  
For Crisis Services and Providers

Family Support:  
**Nar-Anon**  
Narcotics Anonymous Family Support  
For local meetings visit:  
[www.na.org](http://www.na.org)

**Al-Anon**  
Alcoholics Anonymous Family Support  
For local meetings visit:  
[www.al-anon.org](http://www.al-anon.org)

Services:  
**Pretera Center**  
3375 US Rt. 60 East Huntington WV  
(304) 399-7776

**Recovery Point**  
2425 9<sup>th</sup> Ave. Huntington WV  
(304) 523-4673

**Her Place**  
1524 10<sup>th</sup> Ave. Huntington WV  
(304) 525-7394

**River Park Hospital**  
1230 6<sup>th</sup> Ave. Huntington WV  
(304) 526-9111

# **Heroin Addiction**

## **A Guide for Parents, Partners, & Friends**

# **Save A Life Call 9-1-1**