

)))FORWARD FEED MAGAZINE(((+HEALTH+INFO+PROGRESS+

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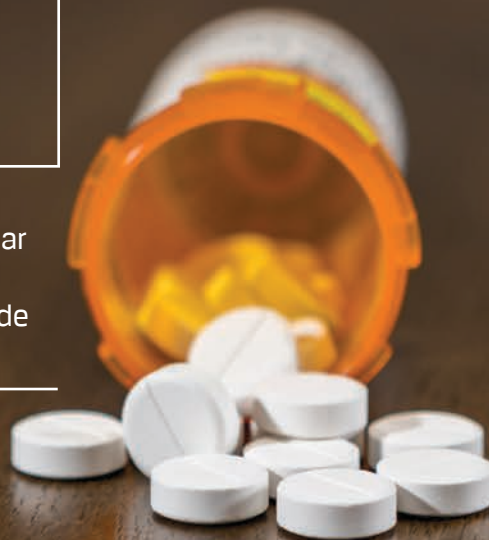
HEROIN & OPIOID ABUSE *Is Out of Control*

Heroin and other opioids have created a huge public health crisis.

In the 1990s, pharmaceutical companies started promising the medical community that opioids were safe, and doctors began prescribing them more. Because of this, large numbers of people started to abuse/misuse them. This has led to countless overdoses and deaths.

What Are Opioids?

Opioids are drugs that react to opioid receptors in the brain and reduce pain signals. The most popular illegal opioids are heroin and Fentanyl. The most commonly abused prescription medications include oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, and morphine.



OVERDOSES ON THE RISE

Seventy-two percent of all deaths due to drug overdoses involve opioids. That's more than 49,000 people who overdose and die from heroin and other opioids each year.

A paper cutout of a person is standing on a syringe. The person is cut out from a single piece of paper, with their arms and legs spread out. The syringe is a clear plastic syringe with a blue plunger. The person's feet are on the plunger. The syringe has markings for 0.5, 1, 2, 2.5, and 3ml. The background is a dark, blurred surface.

***An overdose can happen to
anyone at any time, even
during the first use.***

Fentanyl: Tiny and Deadly



Fentanyl is an opioid intended to treat severe pain, often given to cancer patients. It's between 50 and 100 times stronger than morphine and 20-50 times more potent than heroin.

A Deadly Dose

Even a tiny amount of Fentanyl can be lethal, and people can accidentally ingest too much without realizing. This has led to a massive surge in overdoses and deaths.



Illegal Fentanyl can be disguised in many ways. It can also be sold by mixing it with heroin and other drugs as a cheap way to make them stronger. This is the main reason why Fentanyl is so dangerous – users don't even know what they're taking.

Real-World Deaths

In February of 2021, TV host Dr. Laura Berman's 16-year-old son overdosed and died after taking Fentanyl-laced Xanax. Dr. Laura believes that he didn't know he was getting something that had Fentanyl in it. He experimented with prescription drugs, and the situation turned horrifying and deadly because he didn't know what he was taking. It can happen to anyone who experiments with these deadly drugs.



HEROIN: **ADDICTIVE & DEADLY**

Heroin is a semi-synthetic opioid made from morphine and is usually found in a white or brown powder, or as a sticky tar-like substance. From there, it can be injected, sniffed, snorted, or smoked in order to get the user high.

No form of heroin is legal or safe. Heroin can be especially dangerous when containing Fentanyl, but even when it doesn't, there is still a significant risk of dependence, addiction, overdose, and death.

**Heroin and
Opioids destroy
the body from the
inside.**



Staggering Side Effects

There are many nasty side effects of abusing heroin and opioids. Some of the most common side effects are:

Physical Side Effects

- Nausea/vomiting
- Fading in and out of a sleep-like state
- Liver disease
- Heart attack
- Kidney disease
- Coma
- Seizures
- Death

Cognitive/Behavioral Side Effects

- Changes in mood
- Irritability
- Extreme anger
- Hallucinations
- Insomnia
- Brain fog
- Slurred speech
- Lack of motivation

MIND MALFUNCTIONS

Opioids **DESTROY** The Brain

long-term use of opioids can change a person's brain. Because of how opioids change chemicals in the brain, it is one of the hardest addictions to overcome.

When a person uses opioids, neurochemicals called dopamine and serotonin flood the brain, triggering a "feel-good" response. The body can't produce this feeling naturally, so it can become addicted to the feeling (sometimes after the first use).

Opioid use also affects the way a person's brain reacts to pain and stress. Once dependent on opioids, it will be harder to tolerate discomfort without them.

It doesn't stop there. Long-term opioid use can also cause white matter in the brain to deteriorate. This may make it difficult to use reason and make good decisions. It's also possible for long-term opioid users to suffer from dementia-like symptoms.

The adverse side effects of opioid use can be dire, and they don't all just disappear once a person stops using the drugs.

The side effects can be severe and life-long.

OPIOIDS

Addiction And Dependence Guaranteed

How Do People Become Addicted?

Many people who become addicted started by taking legally prescribed opioids. Unfortunately, the medications are incredibly addictive, and people get hooked very quickly. The body becomes physically dependent on the drug, and then more of it is needed just to get another high.

Once addicted, the user needs the drugs just to feel "normal." Users then start illegally buying prescription opioids, like oxycodone, Percocet, and Vicodin. These drugs get expensive when purchasing them on the streets.

Users switch to purchasing heroin, which is cheaper and more potent than prescription pills. They start out snorting and end up shooting.

No one who tried drugs for the first time ever thought they'd find themselves shooting heroin into their bodies in a needle, but that's what addiction can do.

The desperation felt after getting hooked leads people to do things they never thought they would.



Signs of Addiction

It's important to know the signs of addiction so you know what to look for if you think someone is abusing drugs.

These are some common signs

- **Lying, cheating, or stealing** just to gain access to the drug.

- **Buying it illegally** on the street.

- **Increased tolerance** - needing more of it to get the desired effect.

- **Taking too much** at a time and running out before the refill.

- **Missing school/work/family obligations** because of drug use.

- **Taking it in ways other than prescribed** – snorting it or injecting it.

- **Mixing it** with alcohol and other drugs.

- **Continued usage** of the drug, even though they want to stop.

- **Constantly worrying about running out** of drugs.

- **Driving or doing other dangerous activities** while they're **under the influence of drugs**.

- **Experiencing physical withdrawal** symptoms when they stop using the drug.

- **Falling behind on bills** because they're **spending too much money on drugs**.

- **Focusing excessive energy and time on getting and using drugs, while ignoring responsibilities** and healthier activities.

- **Craving the drug** regularly. This can be daily or several times during the day.

Addiction can sometimes make people do bad things, but it doesn't always make them a bad person—just a person that needs help.

SHARED NEEDLES SPREAD DISEASE

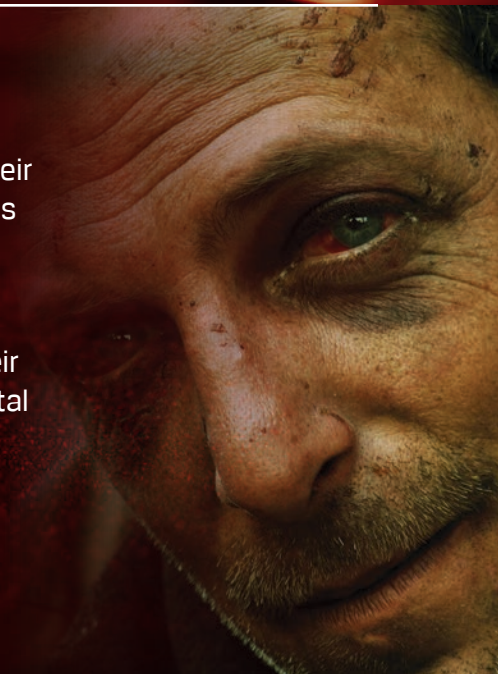
Even if a person doesn't overdose or die, there are still risks associated with using opioids. When a person injects these drugs into their veins, they are at a higher risk for diseases.



***Many IV users share
needles with someone else,
which spreads HIV/AIDS or
Hepatitis.***



A drug user's life will begin to fall apart because of their addiction. Their addiction becomes so all consuming that they neglect personal hygiene. They ruin both their physical and mental health.



WITHDRAWAL

When a person stops using opioids, they can experience **withdrawal symptoms** within as little as a few hours that can last for days. Many users feel so terrible during a withdrawal that they seek out more drugs just to feel half-way "normal" again.



Common withdrawal symptoms are:

- Severe flu-like symptoms
- Intense bone and muscle pain
- Chills
- Insomnia
- Restlessness
- Abdominal cramping
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Diarrhea
- Sweating

Withdrawal symptoms can lead to death when not urgently treated.



What Happens During an Overdose?

When a person uses opioids, there is always a risk of taking too much.

Too much and the user's breathing slows or stops, which can lead to lack of oxygen to the brain and death. Recognizing when someone has overdosed can potentially save their life. Some common signs include:

- Slow and shallow breathing
- Fingernails, lips and/or skin turning blue.
- Vomiting
- Clammy skin
- Weak pulse
- Low blood pressure
- Disorientation
- Slurred speech
- Inability to have a conversation
- Choking or gurgling sounds (some people refer to this as the death-rattle)
- Unconsciousness
- Coma

An overdose is a life-or-death emergency so here is what you should do if you suspect someone has overdosed:

- Call 9-1-1 immediately to report the situation
- Remain calm and gather evidence and information (such as what was taken or any leftover drugs around the person)
- Check to see if they're breathing
- If unconscious, lay the person on their side to reduce the chance of choking
- DO NOT try to make the person vomit or give them food or water unless you're told to do so by emergency personnel



If you have it available and you know the person has overdosed on an opioid, an alternative could be to administer Naloxone (which comes in a nasal spray or auto-injectable).

This medication will return an overdose victim's breathing that has slowed or even stopped to normal.

RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE

Help is Available

Now that you know what signs to look out for, it's important to have resources available if you're close with someone who is struggling to stop using drugs. It is difficult to quit, but always remember Recovery is possible.

With proper treatment, as well as long-term support systems like 12-step programs (such as Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous), many can go on to live productive lives.



The Treatment Process

Often the best course of action to help someone struggling with addiction is some kind of treatment. There are a few different options available, depending on the person's needs.

Inpatient Treatment

If someone is struggling to stop using drugs, one of the best options for them is to go to an inpatient treatment facility where doctors, nurses, therapists/psychologists, psychiatrists, and certified addiction counselors are available for 24-hour care.

Outpatient treatment

If inpatient treatment is not an option, outpatient treatment is also available. The highest level of outpatient care is a partial hospitalization program (PHP). The PHP is similar to treatment a patient would receive at an inpatient facility, except patients go home at night.



Relapse

When a person stops using drugs for a period of time but then starts using them again, this is called a relapse. All addictive substances pose the risk for relapse, but those struggling with heroin and opioids have a higher chance of relapse.

RECOVERY

A relapse is a common part of recovery, but doesn't always happen. If you know someone who relapses, it doesn't mean they've ruined everything. They can get help again and stop using drugs before things get even worse.

There are many different things someone can do to help prevent a relapse from occurring. If you have a friend or a family member who is struggling with addiction, it will be helpful for you to know what often leads to a relapse so you can try to help them.



REAL-LIFE STORY

OF HOPE AND RECOVERY



Aaron Rultenberg, a 33-year-old recovering addict, started using drugs at the age of 12, stealing prescription pills from friends and family. He later progressed to heroin after college, went into treatment at 24 and has been in recovery since then. He now works at a treatment center helping others overcome their addictions.

Q: When did you first use drugs?

I first started using drugs when I was around 12 or 13 years old by stealing prescription pills from medicine cabinets of family members and friends.

Q: When, why, and how did you switch from prescription opiates to heroin?

I was given heroin before I knew what it was or what I was taking. My dealer was out of pills one day and gave me capsules filled with a beige powder to break open and snort. She said something along the lines of "this is the same thing you always take," and since I was at the point where I would get physically ill if I didn't have my pills, I did what she said.

When I finished college, I moved home and didn't know anywhere to get pills. I had heard from other drug users that you could go to a certain area of the city that I lived near and buy heroin from your car. I did this every day without fear or hesitation for the next four years.

Q: Did you ever experience an overdose?

I overdosed one time. I took about 30 Vicodin pills and then went out for a few beers. I remember being face down in a wet alley, I recall a brief ambulance ride, and I recall a doctor and his team of students who were about the same age as me. They were standing over me in my hospital bed the next morning, all staring at me and taking notes.

Q: Is there anything someone could have said to you that would have made a difference in your drug use?

If someone had told me sooner that there was the option of getting sober, going to treatment, and working a 12-step program, it's possible I could have been spared a few years of pain and suffering.

Q: Any advice for young people who are considering trying drugs?

It's almost impossible for young people to envision the long-term effects of continued drug use. I could never have imagined how far down the rabbit hole drugs were about to take me and everyone who I ever came into contact with. Think twice. Think a third time. Sleep on it. It was never worth it, not for a second.

Resources For Help

Trying any kind of drug will never be worth it, and even experimenting with heroin and opioids can ruin your future.

There are many resources available for people addicted to drugs, with people standing by to provide help to those struggling.

FindTreatment.gov

This site provides information about addiction, helps users find nearby treatment facilities, and outlines what to expect from a treatment program.

SAMHSA National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

The National Helpline is available 24/7, 365 days a year and is staffed by trained specialists who can help callers connect with treatment resources in their state or area.



JUST **DON'T** DO IT



PREVIEW

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