

HEROIN

Street Names

H, Junk, Horse, Smack, Skag, Brown, Gear, Diamorphine.

Description

Heroin can be a brown powder (impure) or a white powder (pure).

Routes of Use

Injection, sniffing or smoking. Heroin can be smoked with tobacco, heated on tin foil ('chasing the dragon'), snorted or injected, either just below the skin's surface ('skin popping') or directly into a vein ('mainlining').

History

Heroin is derived from the sap of the opium poppy, *Papaverum Somniferum*. It belongs to a class of drugs called the opiates that are analogues of the naturally occurring biochemical morphine. They have been used as very effective painkillers, cough suppressants and anti-diarrhoea drugs. Opiates were very popular in the 19th century and were thought to be a 'cure all' medicine. They were available in grocers shops without any prescription. The 1960's and 70's saw a rise in their recreational use. Synthetic versions, collectively called Opioids, are also available as painkillers.

Effects People Seek

Heroin provides a feeling of well being, warmth and relaxation. There is sedation of the nervous system and a slowing of the heart and breathing rate. At lower doses the user is conscious and has full control over his sensory and motor skills. It appears as if he is living in a dream-like world.

Other Effects

Initial use tends to be accompanied by nausea and vomiting. Regular use can lead to dependence, constipation and interruption of the menstrual cycle. High doses can produce stupor, coma and even death due to respiratory failure in some cases. Adverse reactions can occur due to impurities used to 'cut' the heroin by the dealer. In the long term tolerance can develop to such an extent that heroin is required just to feel 'normal'. The tolerance is what causes people to increase their dosage or to move from sniffing/smoking to injecting. Repeated sniffing can damage the delicate membranes of the nose and injecting can lead to a variety of disorders especially HIV/AIDS.

Dependence & Tolerance

Heroin is not instantly addictive, but with regular usage the body adjusts and tolerance sets in, until no pleasurable feelings are felt at all. By then the body needs the drug just to stay 'normal' and keep off the pains of withdrawal. Feeding this addiction can cost up to £100 per day. Physical dependence to the drug is over shadowed by the strong psychological dependence after long term use.

The Law

Heroin is a class A drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971). It is illegal to possess, supply or produce the drug. The maximum sentences that can be imposed by a Crown Court are: Possession, 7 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. Supply, Life imprisonment and/or unlimited fine. It is an offence to be in charge of a motor vehicle whilst 'unfit through drugs', sentences include a period of disqualification, fines and, especially after previous convictions, imprisonment.