

## **BARBITURATES - *Barbs, barbies, blue bullets, blue devils, gorillas, nembies, pink ladies, red devils, sleepers***

Barbiturates are synthetic drugs that used to be regularly prescribed for anxiety, depression and insomnia. However, they are highly dangerous because of the small difference between a normal dose and an overdose.

**HISTORY :** A large number of barbiturates have been manufactured for medical use since 1903. They were originally advertised as being completely safe and without any side effects. Despite stories of fatal overdoses, physical dependence and unpleasant effects, medical use grew dramatically in the 1950s and 1960s, especially as sleeping tablets. In 1966 there were over 16 million prescriptions for barbiturates in the UK. Barbiturates diverted or stolen from medical supplies also became commonly used as street drugs.

**EFFECTS/ RISKS:** Barbiturates are sedative drugs which slow down the central nervous system in a similar way to alcohol. A small dose will make people feel relaxed, sociable and good-humoured. With larger doses, hostility and anxiety are common effects and slurred speech, loss of co-ordination and difficulty staying awake may follow. Falling over and accidents become more likely.

When injected into a vein, barbiturates produce an almost immediate feeling of warmth and drowsiness. Besides the usual hazards of injecting (hepatitis, HIV etc.), barbiturate injectors run an increased risk of overdose, gangrene and skin abscesses.

As with other substances, tolerance and physical dependence develop with regular use. Withdrawal from regular use may result in irritability, anxiety, inability to sleep, faintness and nausea, twitching and occasionally convulsions. After very high doses and regular use, severe withdrawal symptoms are likely to include seizures, low blood pressure, delirium and hallucinations. Sudden withdrawal from high doses can be fatal. Heavy users are also liable to bronchitis and pneumonia (because the cough reflex is suppressed) and hypothermia. Regular use of barbiturates in the later stages of pregnancy can result in withdrawal symptoms in newborn babies.

Source: [www.drugscope.org.uk](http://www.drugscope.org.uk)