

Heroin (H, Smack, Brown)

Facts

- Heroin is a painkilling drug made from the opium poppy, which has been the most effective painkiller known to medicine for at least 7,000 years.
- Other opiates with a similar effect include morphine, codeine, methadone, palfium, diconal and pethidine.
- Processed heroin in the street is in the form of brown powder.
- Most of the illicit heroin comes from poppies grown in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

How is Heroin used?

- Heroin can be sniffed, smoked or injected.
- The effects are similar but each method has different risks.
- Smoking is safer since it enters the body gradually, so the dose can be more easily regulated.

Effects

- Heroin is a sedative drug. It relaxes the brain and slows down the heart and breathing.
- The user feels physically and mentally calm, creating a sensation of security and safety from life's problems.
- At high doses the user can become drowsy and fall asleep.

What are the problems associated with Heroin?

- If the user takes too much heroin, they can overdose - the breathing stops.
- The purity of heroin can vary, making it difficult to measure the strength.
- The risk of overdose increases if other drugs are used at the same time, especially 'sedative-type' drugs such as alcohol, Methadone and tranquillisers.
- It tends to slow the action of the intestine, inducing sickness and causing constipation.
- Injecting is the most dangerous way of using heroin.
 - The possibility of overdose increases because the drug reaches the brain very quickly.
 - Impurities are introduced directly into the blood-stream.
 - Sharing injecting equipment can cause hepatitis and HIV.
- Anyone using heroin regularly may experience:
 - Tolerance - a need for larger doses to get the same effect
 - Withdrawal symptoms - runny nose, sweats, chills and cramps, if the drug is stopped.
 - A psychological craving for the drug

What help is available for Heroin users?

- Options include methadone prescribing, in-patient withdrawal and residential rehabilitation.
- Injecting drug users can get free syringes from health centres, counselling, and treatment from specific organisations.