

REDUCING HARM FROM HEROIN

- Burning (chasing the dragon) is safer than injecting, but you can still become dependent and risk overdosing when smoking heroin
- Never share your injecting equipment, including the spoon, water, filter and tourniquet as this increases the risk of transmitting blood borne viruses such as Hep B, Hep C and HIV
- If you inject, always use new fits. Bleaching is the last resort
- Don't use cigarette filters – they contain fibreglass, which can damage your veins. Use a filter wheel, or a small ball
- Ensure you dispose of injecting equipment safely
- Avoid using alone in case you overdose

WHAT IF YOUR FRIEND OVERDOSES?

- If the person is unconscious, check their airway is clear, place them on their side and into the recovery position
- Call an ambulance on 000 and stay with them
- If there is no pulse, start applying CPR if you are trained

USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS

Emergency **000**
DirectLine **1800 888 236**
Drug Info **1300 858 584**
North and West Metro Alcohol and Other Drug Service Intake **1800 700 514**
Suicide Helpline **1300 651 251**
Family Drug Help **1300 660 068**
Hepatitis Helpline **1800 703 003**
Narcotics Anonymous **9525 2833**
North West Mental Health Triage **1300 874 243**

© Substance Use and Mental Illness Treatment Team (SUMITT) 2015.
Information contained in this pamphlet is offered for general purposes and should not be considered as substitute advice from your mental health treating team, drug and alcohol worker or GP.



**AND
YOUR
MENTAL
HEALTH**

HEROIN



HEROIN AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

What is Heroin?

Heroin is an opioid. Other opioids include methadone, morphine, oxycodone, and codeine. Opioids are depressant drugs, which slow down the activity of the central nervous system. Heroin is commonly smoked or injected.

Other names for Heroin

Smack, skag, H, junk, hammer, gear, horse, dope.

Heroin and your mental health

- People may use heroin to improve their mood but it can worsen symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Heroin can mask symptoms of psychosis and can interfere with the effectiveness of your psychiatric medication
- Heroin use can cause a lot of stress in your life such as debt, conflict in your relationships and problems with the law or other drug users

Heroin and high risk situations

Heroin and other opiates contribute to over 90% of deaths associated with illicit drug use.

Heroin and other drugs

Using heroin with other depressants such as alcohol, other opiates (e.g. methadone), benzodiazepines (e.g. Valium) or other prescribed medication can result in overdose and death.

What happens when you stop using Heroin

If you have been using heroin regularly you are very likely to experience withdrawal symptoms when you stop. The first 3 – 4 days are usually the most difficult. Withdrawal symptoms may include:

- Runny nose
- Sweating
- Stomach pain and cramps
- Aching bones and joints
- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- Sore throat
- Strong cravings for heroin
- Irritability
- Cramps
- Loss of appetite
- Sleeping difficulties
- Bizarre or disturbing dreams

Most of these symptoms ease after 6 – 7 days but some, such as depression, anxiety and insomnia, may take a longer time to subside.

Opioid Substitute Therapy (OST) e.g. methadone and suboxone

The current evidence indicates opioid substitution therapy with suboxone or methadone is associated with improved outcomes. Although abstinence may be the ideal goal, this can be very difficult to achieve and OST can lead to stabilisation enabling people to make positive changes in their lives.

Please contact DirectLine ph 1800 888 236 for OST prescribers.

“Changes are not easy but they’re possible and sometimes necessary” - SUMITT Consumer Consultant

HOW DOES HEROIN AFFECT YOU

- Heroin acts via the reward pathways of the brain and is highly addictive
- The immediate effects are intense pleasure, pain relief, drowsiness, nausea, slowed breathing and heartbeat
- There is no safe level of heroin use. An overdose of heroin can lead to brain damage or death from lack of oxygen

Decreased Tolerance

Regular users of heroin will become tolerant and need more of the drug to achieve a high. Following a period of detoxification, people are at an increased risk of overdose. This can also occur following treatment with Naloxone or Naltrexone.

Heroin and pregnancy

- Heroin can harm an unborn child. Heroin crosses the placenta and your baby may become dependent on the drug
- Using heroin during pregnancy increase the risk of miscarriage or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome
- Methadone or buprenorphine treatment is considered to be safer for mother and the unborn child than continued use of heroin