

HEROIN

What is heroin?

Heroin is an opioid, a term which refers to substances similar to the drug morphine. Heroin comes from the opium poppy and is usually manufactured from morphine or codeine, natural chemicals contained in opium resin.

Pure heroin is produced by a chemical process and is a stronger drug than codeine or morphine. Street heroin is often mixed with other substances – glucose and paracetamol are the most commonly reported cutting agents.

Heroin can be used in many ways. It can be snorted like cocaine, smoked by heating and inhaling the fumes ('chasing the dragon') or injected. Injecting or 'mainlining' directly into the veins is often the preferred route of administration because the effect is immediate. Heroin can also be injected under the skin ('skin popping') or intramuscularly but these are not preferred as the rush is less intense.

How many people use heroin?

Heroin has been tried by very few Australians. According to the 2001 National Drug Household Survey, 2% of the Australian population reported using heroin at some time, with less than 1% having used it in the last 12 months.

- 1% of 14-19 year olds reported ever using heroin
- 4% of 20-29 year olds reported ever using the drug

The average age at first use was 20.7 years.

The 1999 Secondary School Survey also indicated that very few young people attending high school across Australia had ever experimented with heroin with 4% of 12-17 year old males and 4% of females ever reporting use.

- 7% of 17 year old males reported ever using heroin
- 4% of 17 year old females reported ever using heroin
- 3% of 12 year old males reported ever using heroin
- 2% of 12 year old females reported ever using heroin

Other names for heroin

Heroin is also known as smack, H, hammer, skag, horse, dope, rocks, powder, slow, whack, Harry, China white and white.



What are the short-term effects of heroin?

The short-term effects of using heroin may include:

- euphoria and well-being
- nausea and vomiting
- dilation of pupils
- drowsiness
- slurred speech
- relief of pain

What are the long-term effects of heroin?

The long-term effects of using heroin may include:

- chronic constipation
- lowered sex drive and impotence in men, irregular menstruation and infertility in women
- social and financial problems
- tolerance and withdrawal symptoms with cessation of use
- coma and/or death from overdose due to low tolerance or use of other depressant drugs in combination

What do we know about heroin overdose?

Heroin overdose is now one of the leading causes of death in Australia in the 18-34 year age group. Non-fatal overdoses are also common amongst heroin users. Although purity is a factor in overdoses, a bigger issue is the use of other drugs in combination, particularly alcohol.

NDARC research suggests that a 'typical' person who overdoses on heroin is an unemployed man in his thirties who has been using the drug for 10-15 years.