

# Heroin



**How is Heroin Used?** Heroin can be injected, inhaled by snorting or sniffing, or smoked.

All three routes of administration deliver the drug to the brain very rapidly, which contributes to its health risks and to its high risk for addiction, which is a chronic relapsing disease caused by changes in the brain and characterized by uncontrollable drug-seeking no matter the consequences.



**WHAT IS HEROIN?** Heroin is an opioid drug. It is synthesized from morphine, a naturally occurring substance extracted from the seed pod of the Asian poppy plant. Heroin usually appears as a white or brown powder or as a black sticky substance.

## Signs/Symptoms of Heroin Use:

- Needle marks on arms or legs that could resemble small bruises or red dots
- Pale, gaunt skin coloration
- Bloodshot eyes; extremely small pinpoint pupils
- Itchy skin, which may be scratched to the point of a sore or scab
- Impaired motor coordination; movement that is slowed or uncoordinated.
- Heroin users may nod off suddenly
- Dry mouth, Persistent hacking cough
- Sores on nostrils or lips (from smoking)
- Runny nose or constant sniffing (from the release of histamine that heroin causes) or nosebleeds.

## Remnants of Heroin Use That You Might Find

Heroin is usually snorted injected or occasionally smoked. So depending on the method of administration, you could find remnants of the drugs or the paraphernalia of drug use left behind. Heroin itself may be a **powdery or crumbly substance**, ranging all the way from off-white to dark brown. Black tar heroin is nearly black and is sticky instead of powdery.

You might find **syringes or tiny orange caps from disposable syringes**. A person dissolving the drug and injecting it might leave **dirty spoons**, metal cookers or aluminum foil and lighters around. A person injecting also needs some device to cause the veins to enlarge, so there may be **belts, shoelaces, or rubber tubing (arm ties) and cotton balls** found in the area where he or she is using the heroin. Those snorting the drug might use rolled up paper or empty plastic pen tubes.



**RESOURCES:** National Institute on Drug Abuse [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov); Wisconsin Department of Justice [www.doj.state.wi.us/dci/heroin-awareness/a-dangerous-epidemic](http://www.doj.state.wi.us/dci/heroin-awareness/a-dangerous-epidemic)

**If you need to find professional help:** Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or use the [SAMHSA Treatment Services, Treatment Services Locator](http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment-locator). Free, completely confidential and available 24/7/365, SAMHSA's National Helpline and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment Services Locator can help you find substance abuse treatment facilities, support groups and community-based organizations in your area.