

## Overcoming Heroin Addiction: What Makes It So Addictive Anyway?

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Since 2017, the use of the potent and highly addictive opiate, heroin addiction throughout the United States has continued to reach epidemic proportions, and the problem does not seem to be disappearing anytime soon. Not only are people using heroin more than ever before, but, the rate at which they are becoming addicted, demonstrates that the drug is more dangerous than any time in the past.

Addictions to anything including drugs are rarely instantaneous, as people who abuse drugs must do so for a long period of time to develop changes in the brain that are associated with addictive behaviors and compulsive use. Although, with a drug such as heroin, with just one use, that is enough for a user to become hooked and develop an immediate addiction, and at a staggering speed.

### What Is Heroin?

First manufactured in 1898 by the German pharmaceutical company Bayer, heroin was originally on the market to be used as a treatment for tuberculosis, and surprisingly, to help those with addictions to morphine.

Heroin is a highly addictive illicit drug, known as an opioid. The drug is derived from morphine, a common pain reliever that is found in the Asian poppy plant. It is removed from the plant as a sticky/goosey sap-like substance, further refined to make different forms of heroin. Morphine is also another addictive drug that puts people at high risk for drug dependence and addiction.

Heroin comes in a white, brown, or black powder after it is fully processed. True and pure heroin is the common white powder we see today. Most heroin is injected, but it can also be smoked and snorted. The methods to which the drug is used increases a person's addiction risk tenfold.

This drug is one of the most potent, and can quickly result in severe dependency and addiction, and worse, overdose and death, which are a commonality in users because of the underestimation of the heroin's power.

### How Addictive Is Heroin?

Heroin is still one of the most addictive substances used and abused throughout the country as evidence has continued to demonstrate. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, approximately 4.2 million people throughout the United States have used heroin at some time in their lives[1]. As a result of use, 23 percent end up developing a dependency on the drug.

By the late 1990s, heroin's death rate was estimated to be at an all-time high, twenty times greater than the rest of the population. That statistic alone tells you how deadly this drug can be with just one try.

### Why Is Heroin Addictive?

Many myths and misunderstandings have built up around the origin of heroin, how it affects the brain and body, who uses and abuses it and why, and lastly, how addiction to it forms[2].

Heroin is one of those unpredictable drugs because it usually doesn't cause such intense side-effects known as the euphoric rush. While it does get you high and feelings of euphoria does occur, it isn't the same as if someone were doing cocaine or crystal meth. However, don't underestimate the power of this prescription drug, as it is known and described as one of the most addictive and deadly drugs on the market.

Prescription opioids are more expensive and harder to access than heroin. Many people who become addicted to heroin because it's cheaper and easier to find on the street. However, today heroin is often mixed with a chemical called fentanyl. This means that heroin is not pure, and when laced with fentanyl it is often a deadly concoction, causing millions of overdoses and deaths annually. The reasons why heroin is so addictive include:

- Easily Accessible and cheaper option
- It is extremely potent
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Forever rewires the brain's chemistry
- One use can make someone dependant and use other drugs in conjunction
- When mixed with fentanyl it is deadly

### References

1. NIDA (2021).What is the scope of heroin use in the United States?.
2. Wide-ranging online data for epidemiologic research (WONDER). Atlanta, GA: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics (2020).

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