

## Heroin and other Opiates

Heroin comes from the family of drugs known as opiates, or narcotics. This family includes useful drugs such as morphine and codeine. It also includes the illicit drug, opium. Opiates can come in a number of forms such as a liquid, crystals and powder.

Heroin, the opiate most commonly sold on the streets, is usually processed into a white or brown powder. It is often mixed, or cut, with another powder to reduce its potency and to increase the profits of the dealer. The powder can be inhaled, ingested and smoked but the most common route of administration is intravenous injection. Intravenous users often share needles, spreading diseases such as hepatitis and the virus that causes AIDS. Intravenous users may also suffer from skin abscesses, inflamed or collapsed veins, tetanus and cardiac disease.

Addiction to opiates, which can occur after one use, causes a craving that many addicts are willing to sacrifice anything and everything to satisfy; including acts of violence and risky behavior such as unprotected sex. When the “high” wears off, the users may experience pain, paranoia, insomnia and become physically ill.

Heroin and other opiate use during pregnancy can lead to the death of the unborn child or miscarriage. Babies can be born addicted to the drugs that pass from their mothers’ systems to theirs. Along with having to go through withdrawal, these babies often experience developmental disabilities.