

# Safer Use of Heroin

## Injecting

- Use a sharp, sterile syringe each time you inject.
- **Do not share paraphernalia** (including syringes and stems) to avoid the transmission of HIV, hepatitis, TB and other infectious diseases.
- Use **alcohol pads** on the injection site before fixing.
- Rotate your injection sites.
- **Take your time** and make sure you're in a vein before you inject.
- For bruising of veins and tissue, apply Arnica tincture or cream (available at herb stores).
- **Skin popping or muscling** is not advisable. If you do, however, then immediately apply hot water with a wash cloth or compress to prevent an abscess and infection.

## Smoking

Many of the health risks associated with injecting are absent with smoking, although this method may cause problems for people with asthma, TB, pneumonia, and other respiratory problems, and there may be health risks related to smoking off of aluminium.

## Snorting

Snorting causes nasal damage by deteriorating the mucous membranes of the septum (the main cartilage in the nose). Long-term use may eat a hole through your septum.

## Detox

Most people stop using heroin on their own, although some may seek professional help in the form of drug treatment.

## Tips for Coming Off Heroin

- You can detox all at once (going cold turkey) by simply stopping your use of all opiates, or detox more slowly by cutting down your dose or using methadone, clonidine, or Darvon to help you through (these drugs must be prescribed by a doctor or clinic). Switching from one opiate to another in order to detox, (e.g., from heroin to methadone) sometimes makes the process a little easier.
- Using Valium, alcohol, or marijuana while detoxing makes most people feel worse.
- Getting acupuncture may help.
- Drinking lots of liquids (especially juices) to prevent dehydration and electrolyte depletion from the sweating and diarrhoea is very important.
- Try to make a plan:
  - Get some time off of work.
  - Find a place for your kids to go for a few days.
  - Try to get some support from friends or family.
  - Decide if you're going to do a cold-turkey or gradual-reduction detox and where you're going to do it.
- After you've finished your detox, you'll probably experience the new challenge of not using again and will have to find other ways of filling up your time.

# Avoiding Overdose

- Sample the heroin (particularly if you plan on injecting). For example, do half a hit or inject the hit extra slowly. Do this especially when the drug is from a new source or if you haven't used for a while and your tolerance is down.
- Your chances of overdose may increase if you mix heroin and other drugs that depress the body such as alcohol, barbiturates (Seconal, Tuinal), and benzodiazepines (Valium, Ativan, Xanax).
- Mixing a shot of heroin with cocaine("speedball") or amphetamine (speed) is also more dangerous than using either by itself.
- If you haven't used for a while, you no longer have the same tolerance to heroin - so a dose that would have been fine in the past may now kill you.
- It's always safer to use with a responsible and caring friend so that if something happens, your friend might be able to see you through it.

## What to do if someone overdoses:

A person who has overdosed on heroin will usually stop breathing, have no pulse, may vomit and turn bluish, and have cold skin.

- Call 911 immediately!
- Try to keep them up, moving around, and breathing. If this isn't possible, at least keep their airways clear.
- Lean their body forward so the lungs don't fill with fluid.
- Apply CPR. Learning CPR is probably the single most important thing you can do to help someone survive an overdose.
- Don't leave the person alone. You'll need to be there when the ambulance comes so that you can help your friend through this scary experience. If you're worried about the police showing up with the ambulance, try to stash or get rid of your drugs and works before they show up.

### Disclaimer

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