

This resource provides a summary of heroin, including info on what it is, how it affects your mind and body, what happens when you have too much, mixing with other drugs, ways you can be safer and where to get support if you feel like you need it.

Also known as: *smack, gear, dope, junk, hammer, H.*

What is heroin?

Heroin is an opioid, which comes from the opium poppy plant.

Heroin can look like a white powder, or grains of light brown rock. It is packaged in foils or small balloons and sold as a 'cap'. Heroin is usually injected, but it's also smoked and sometimes snorted.¹

How heroin can make you feel (short-term):

Your mood before you use heroin, the people you are with, and the surroundings you're in can impact your experience. You might feel:



warm

relaxed

happy

sleepy

confused

clumsy

trouble

concentrating.^{1,2}

You will feel something immediately if injecting or smoking and in 10 to 15 minutes if snorting.²

What heroin can do to your body (short-term):



slow breathing

slow heart rate

pain relief

reduced sex drive

sweating

feeling sick/
vomiting^{1,2}

This also depends on your size/weight and health, if you're used to heroin, if other drugs are taken around the same time, how much you use, and the strength of the heroin.

How long does heroin last?

3-5 hours.

What happens when I use too much heroin at once?

Using lots of heroin can slow down a person's breathing too much. This is an overdose and can lead to death.

You might experience:

- blueish/grey lips and fingertips
- unable to speak properly
- cold and clammy skin
- very sleepy or passing out completely.^{1,2}

If you or someone you know reacts like this after using heroin, call triple zero (000) immediately. Ambulance officers do not have to involve the police unless there is a threat to their safety.

What happens if I use a lot of heroin for a long time?

Using heroin all the time may lead to:

- dependence/addiction
- damage to your veins and skin if you inject a lot
- damage to heart, lungs, liver and brain
- feeling sad all the time
- problems with sex drive and getting pregnant
- your Mob might get worried about you.¹⁻³



What happens when I stop using heroin after a while?

Giving up heroin after a long time can be hard because the body is not used to going without it, and you can go into withdrawal.

You might experience:

- sweating
- chills
- muscle spasms
- feeling annoyed or anxious
- trouble sleeping
- sore bones and muscles
- diarrhoea
- thirsty
- feeling sick and vomiting.^{1,2,4}

It's important to speak to a doctor or other support person if you want to stop using heroin, you can also call one of the support numbers at the end of this page.

What happens when I mix heroin with other drugs?



Heroin + gunja: these drugs might increase the effects of each other slightly.³



Heroin + ice: heroin lowers your heart rate and ice speeds it up, masking the effects of each other. Depending on how much you take, you could overdose on either drug if one wears off before the other.³



Heroin + cocaine: cocaine speeds up heart rate and heroin slows it down, masking the effects of each other. Depending on amount taken, there is risk of heart strain and possible death.³



Heroin + alcohol/GHB/benzos: high risk of overdose, may feel clumsy or wobbly, slow breathing, sick and vomiting, memory loss, passing out, and possible death.³

How can I stay safer?

- Use around Mob you trust and somewhere you feel safe.
- Learn about carrying naloxone (reverses an opioid overdose).
- If injecting, always use new needles, don't share needles, and always wash your hands.
- Try a little bit first up to test how strong it is and how you react before using more.

- Think about snorting or smoking instead to reduce risk of overdose.
- If using a smoking device, boil in hot water to keep it clean.³

Where to get support:

National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline (24/7): 1800 250 015

You can speak with a counsellor over the phone, get information on drugs and links to support services. They speak to family and friends too.

13 Yarn (24/7): 13 92 76

If you need some crisis support, you can get free assistance from this Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support line.

Brother to Brother (24/7): 1800 435 799

Free 24-hour crisis line to support Aboriginal men experiencing issues relating to relationships, family violence, drugs and alcohol.

Yarning Safe and Strong (24/7): 1800 959 563

A service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. You can get free counselling over the phone. They can also support friends and families who need to have a yarn with someone about their wellbeing.

Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS): 03 9419 3000

Provides a wide range of in-person health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria. You can find similar services in different locations across Australia using HealthInfoNet's resource: [Map of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health/medical services](#).

References

1. Campbell A. The Australian Illicit Drug Guide: Every Person's Guide to Illicit Drugs-- Their Use, Effects and History, Treatment Options and Legal Penalties: Black Inc; 2001 [07.02.2023]. Available from: <https://adf.on.worldcat.org/oclc/48404595>.
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3. Hi-Ground. Heroin [24.05.2023]. Available from: <https://hi-ground.org/substances/heroin/>.
4. Black E, Shakeshaft A, Newton N, Teesson M, Farrell M, Rodriguez D. Heroin - What you need to know. National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre: UNSW Sydney; 2014 [14.09.2023]. Available from: <https://positivechoices.org.au/documents/b31vhThz8X/heroin-detailed-resource-for-parentsteachers/>.

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