



Drug Fact Sheet

Narcotics

Overview

Also known as “opioids,” the term “narcotic” comes from the Greek word for “stupor” and originally referred to a variety of substances that dulled the senses and relieved pain. Though some people still refer to all drugs as “narcotics,” today “narcotic” refers to opium, opium derivatives, and their semi-synthetic substitutes. A more current term for these drugs, with less uncertainty regarding its meaning, is “opioid.” Examples include the illicit drug heroin and pharmaceutical drugs like OxyContin®, Vicodin®, codeine, morphine, methadone, and fentanyl.



Street names

Big H, Black Tar, Brown Sugar, Dover's Powder, Hillbilly Heroin, Horse, Junk, Lean or Purple Drank, MPTP (New Heroin), Mud, OC, Ox, Oxy, Oxycotton, Paregoric, Sippin Syrup, Smack

Looks like

Narcotics/opioids come in various forms, including: tablets, capsules, skin patches, powder, chunks in varying colors (from white to shades of brown and black), liquid form for oral use and injection, syrups, suppositories, and lollipops.

Methods of abuse

Narcotics/opioids can be swallowed, smoked, sniffed, or injected.

Affect on mind

Besides their medical use, narcotics/opioids produce a general sense of well-being by reducing tension, anxiety, and aggression. These effects are helpful in a therapeutic setting but contribute to the drugs' abuse. Narcotic/opioid use comes with a variety of unwanted effects, including drowsiness, inability to concentrate, and apathy. Use can create psychological dependence. Long after the physical need for the drug has passed, the addict may continue to think and talk about using drugs and feel overwhelmed coping with daily activities. Relapse is common if there are not changes to the physical environment or the behavioral motivators that prompted the abuse in the first place.

Affect on body

Narcotics/opioids are prescribed by doctors to treat pain, suppress cough, cure diarrhea, and put people to sleep. Effects depend heavily on the dose, how it's taken, and previous exposure to the drug. Negative effects include: slowed physical activity, constriction of the pupils, flushing of the face and neck, constipation, nausea, vomiting, and slowed breathing. As the dose is increased, both the pain relief and the harmful effects become more pronounced. Some of these preparations are so potent that a single dose can be lethal to an inexperienced user. However, except in cases of extreme intoxication, there is no loss of motor coordination or slurred speech. Physical dependence is a consequence of chronic opioid use, and withdrawal takes place when drug use is discontinued. The intensity and character of the physical symptoms experienced during withdrawal are directly related to the particular drug used, the total daily dose, the interval between doses, the duration of use and the health and personality of the user. These symptoms usually appear shortly before the time of the next scheduled dose. Early withdrawal symptoms often include: watery eyes,



Drug Fact Sheet

Narcotics – cont'd.

runny nose, yawning, and sweating. As the withdrawal worsens, symptoms can include: restlessness, irritability, loss of appetite, nausea, tremors, drug craving, severe depression, vomiting, increased heart rate and blood pressure, and chills alternating with flushing and excessive sweating. However, without intervention, the withdrawal usually runs its course, and most physical symptoms disappear within days or weeks, depending on the particular drug.

Drugs causing similar effects

With the exception of pain relief and cough suppression, most central nervous system depressants (like barbiturates, benzodiazepines, and alcohol) have similar effects, including slowed breathing, tolerance, and dependence.

Overdose effects

Overdoses of narcotics are not uncommon and can be fatal. Physical signs of narcotics/opioid overdose include: constricted (pinpoint) pupils, cold clammy skin, confusion, convulsions, extreme drowsiness, and slowed breathing.

Legal status in the United States

Narcotics/opioids are controlled substances that vary from Schedule I to Schedule V, depending on their medical usefulness, abuse potential, safety, and drug dependence profile. Schedule I narcotics, like heroin, have no medical use in the U.S. and are illegal to distribute, purchase, or use outside of medical research.

Common places of origin

The poppy *papaver somniferum* is the source for all natural opioids, whereas synthetic opioids are made entirely in a lab and include meperidine, fentanyl, and methadone. Semi-synthetic opioids are synthesized from naturally occurring opium products, such as morphine and codeine, and include heroin, oxycodone, hydrocodone, and hydromorphone. Teens can obtain narcotics from friends, family members, medicine cabinets, pharmacies, nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, doctors, and the Internet.