

INSPIRED

To Make Healthy Choices

You may have heard that there is a heroin epidemic and wondered how this happened.

There are numerous reasons, but one of the main catalysts to the epidemic has been the over prescription of pain relieving drugs, such as Vicodin, Oxycontin, Percocet and Demerol. **These prescription pain medications have effects similar to heroin.**

Heroin is a narcotic, also called an opiate. These are drugs derived from the opium poppy plant. Opioid refers to both opiates and synthetic substances that mimic opiates. The term opioid can refer to opium, morphine and heroin, as well as man-made drugs such as Fentanyl. All of these are powerful pain killers, which are also very addictive and prone to abuse.

The first step to heroin abuse for many new addicted users was the use and abuse of prescribed drugs. Youth and adults going through surgery and/or dealing with injuries may be prescribed four to seven days or longer of these strong pain relieving drugs and obtain a refill without much of a problem.

Because these pills are legal and prescribed by doctors, users do not see a danger in taking them. Eventually, however, users build up a tolerance to the prescribed pills and taking the prescribed dose doesn't meet their needs. When this happens, many abusers report that crushing pills to snort or inject the powder led to their initiation into the methods of drug administration most commonly used by heroin users. Some of the people who become addicted to the prescription pills find them to be too expensive, so they shift to using heroin, which is much cheaper and easier to get.

Nearly half of young people who inject heroin surveyed in three recent studies reported abusing prescription opioids before starting to use heroin.

- Heroin use in the United States jumped 63% between 2002 and 2013.
- It is estimated that about 23% of individuals who use heroin become dependent on it.
- The vast majority (96%) of people who use heroin also use at least one other drug, and more than half (61%) use at least three other drugs.

A CDC report highlighted that **those at greatest risk for heroin use or dependence** are non-Hispanic whites, men aged 18 to 25 years, those with an annual household income of less than \$20,000, Medicaid recipients and the uninsured.

Heroin may be the most physically addictive of all drugs. It can be snorted, smoked or injected. Tolerance builds quickly, which means that the **user needs more and more to get the same effect.** Much of one's reaction to heroin depends on how pure it is and what substances it may have been mixed with. On the street it is difficult to know what one is getting. It may be laced with another drug and/or fillers. **When an addict doesn't get the drug, painful withdrawal symptoms begin. These may include headache, vomiting and severe pain in muscles and bones.** Heroin addiction is difficult to overcome and usually requires professional help.

The Gwinnett County Police Department has equipped some cruisers with **naloxone**, which **can counter an opiate overdose.** If the officers are able to administer it in time, they may prevent an overdose.

If you, your child or someone you know has been prescribed any of the opioids, **BE AWARE** of their **addictive potential and propensity for abuse.**

We all need to become more vigilant to stem the tide of this epidemic.

For more information:
HEROIN EPIDEMIC
 www.guideinc.org

The US imports 26% of world's heroin supply, yet we have only 6% of the world's population.

Heroin addicts have a diminished ability to learn new information due to changes in their brain chemistry from heroin.

Long-term use of heroin can cause a host of problems, including heart and lung disease.

Prescription drug monitoring programs allow doctors to make informed decisions before prescribing opioid painkillers.

