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To discuss your treatment options call 877-505-4673 anytime.

**Live Help is Online**

"Coming to Gateway saved my life. I knew I was going to die without Gateway's help."

-Mary

> [Read more: Success in Recovery](#)

## Risks of Using Heroin

- It is impossible for users to know the purity of the heroin they are using—so both new and experience users can easily overdose.
- The impact of using heroin is more unpredictable when used with alcohol or other drugs.
- Heroin overdoses—which can result whether the drug is snorted, smoked or injected—can cause slow and shallow breathing, convulsions, coma and even death.
- Heroin can kill. Heroin is one of the most frequently reported drugs by medical examiners in drug abuse deaths.

Heroin users who inject the drug expose themselves to additional risks, including contracting human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B and C, and other blood-borne viruses. Chronic users who inject heroin also risk scarred or collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and valves, abscesses, pneumonia, tuberculosis, as well as liver and kidney disease.

## How does heroin addiction start?

Individuals who abuse heroin over time develop a tolerance for the drug, meaning that they must use increasingly larger doses to achieve the same intensity or effect they experienced when they first began using the drug.

Heroin ceases to produce feelings of pleasure in users who develop tolerance; instead, heroin users must continue taking the drug simply to feel normal.

All heroin users risk becoming addicted.

Addicted individuals who stop using the drug may experience withdrawal symptoms, which include heroin cravings, restlessness, muscle and bone pain, and vomiting.

## Heroin and Your Brain

Heroin enters the brain quickly. It slows down the way a person thinks, slows down reaction time and slows down memory. This affects the way one acts and makes decisions.

When heroin enters the brain, it is converted to morphine and binds to receptors known as opioid receptors. These receptors are located in many areas of the brain (and in the body), especially those involved in the perception of pain and in reward. Opioid receptors are also located in the brain

**Heroin Addiction and Cravings**  
Because heroin enters the brain so rapidly, it is highly addictive, both psychologically and physically.

Heroin cravings can persist years



stem—important for automatic processes critical for life, such as breathing (respiration), blood pressure and arousal. Heroin overdoses frequently involve a suppression of respiration.

after someone stops using the drug. Stress, specific people, places and things associated with heroin use can trigger a relapse.

Users also experience severe craving for the drug during withdrawal, which can precipitate continued abuse and/or relapse. Major withdrawal symptoms peak between 48 and 72 hours after the last dose of the drug and typically subside after about one week. Some individuals, however, may show persistent withdrawal symptoms for months. Although heroin withdrawal is considered less dangerous than alcohol or barbiturate withdrawal, sudden withdrawal by heavily dependent users who are in poor health is occasionally fatal.

*If you suspect someone you know of abusing heroin, alcohol or other substances, Gateway Foundation can help.*

Call today to schedule a free confidential consultation 877-505-HOPE (4673).

The First Step: A Free, Confidential Consultation ([Learn More](#))  
 Call our 24-Hour Helpline to learn more now **877-505-HOPE (877-505-4673)**.

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