

What are the Different Types of Opioids?

Opioids are a class of drugs that include powerful pain relievers that are available by prescription, such as oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), as well as illegal drugs such as heroin. These drugs are chemically related and have similar effects on the brain and body.

Heroin

Heroin is an illegal opioid drug made from morphine, a natural substance taken from the seed pod of the various opium poppy plants. Heroin can be a white or brown powder, or a black sticky substance known as black tar heroin.

People inject, sniff, snort, or smoke heroin. Some people mix heroin with other drugs. It is highly addictive. People who regularly use heroin often develop tolerance, which means that they need higher and/or more frequent doses of the drug to get the desired effects.

A person can overdose on heroin. A heroin overdose occurs when a person uses enough of the drug to produce a life-threatening reaction or death.

Prescription Opioids

Opioid pain relievers are generally safe when taken for a short time and as prescribed by a doctor. However, because they produce euphoria in addition to pain relief, they can be misused (taken in a different way or in a larger quantity than prescribed, or taken without a doctor's prescription). Regular use—even as prescribed by a doctor—can lead to dependence and, when misused or overused, opioid pain relievers can lead to addiction, overdose, and death.

Prescription opioid pain medicines such as oxycodone and hydrocodone have effects similar to heroin. Research suggests that misuse of these drugs may open the door to heroin use. Nearly 80 percent of Americans using heroin (including those in treatment) reported misusing prescription opioids first. Talk to your doctor if you currently have a prescription for opioids.



If you or someone you know has a substance use disorder, also known as addiction, we can help.

Call anytime, toll-free.



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Fentanyl

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is up to 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin. It is both a prescribed drug, as well as a drug that is at times made and used illegally.

Prescription fentanyl is typically used to treat patients with severe pain, especially after surgery. It is also sometimes used to treat patients with chronic pain who are physically tolerant to other opioids.

Fentanyl that is illegally manufactured is dangerous. It is made without the quality controls of pharmaceutical grade fentanyl and is a major contributor to recent increases in synthetic opioid overdose deaths. This illegally manufactured fentanyl is sold illegally as a powder, dropped onto blotter paper, put in eye droppers and nasal sprays, or made into counterfeit pills that look like other prescription opioids.

Importantly, some drug dealers are mixing fentanyl with other drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA. This is especially risky when people taking drugs don't realize that the drugs they are using might contain fentanyl and significantly increase their risk for overdose death.

SOURCE

National Institute on Drug Abuse: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts>

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