**FAQs about Heroin**

* **What is heroin?**

Heroin is a highly addictive opiate drug processed from morphine. Additional names for heroin include "H," "smack," "chiva," "brownstone," "china white," "dope," "junk," "skag," and "horse."

* **How is heroin used?**

Heroin is sold as a white or brownish powder. It is often mixed with other powders like sugar, starch, powder milk, or quinine. The drug can be injected, snorted, or smoked. The drug is typically used to quickly produce a feeling of euphoria.

* **What are the signs of heroin use?**

Physical signs of heroin use include small, pinpoint pupils, slurred speech, slower reflexes, sweating, drowsiness, diarrhea, and needle marks from syringe usage. Behavioral signs of heroin use include severe mood swings, consistent fatigue and drowsiness, neglecting your appearance and placing yourself in unsafe situations.

* **What are the immediate short-term effects of heroin use?**

Once heroin makes contact with the brain, the user experiences a sensation most commonly referred to as "the rush." Initially, heroin enters the brain by crossing the blood-brain barrier. Once entry into the brain has happened, chemical transformation occurs and the drug becomes morphine. The morphine then binds to opioid receptors in the body and produces the euphoric feeling. When using, users tend to experience dry mouth and the body begins to feel heavier. Periods of use are accompanied with nausea, vomiting, and severe itching. After intake, users begin to feel drowsy for several hours, lose mental function abilities, and experience a decrease in heart function and breathing rate.

* **What are the long -term effects of heroin use?**

Repeated heroin use alters the structure and physiology of the brain. In the process, neuron and hormonal systems become imbalanced. Heroin produces a high level of tolerance, meaning the user requires a higher dosage each time they use in order to feel more of a high. Physical dependency intensifies the withdrawal symptoms presented when an abuser attempts to abruptly quit consuming the drug.

* **What are the medical complications of heroin use?**

Heroin use can cause numerous medical complications including but not limited to: insomnia, constipation, depression, sexual dysfunction in men, menstrual complications in women, arthritis, weakened functions of the immune system, and heart and lung problems. A heroin overdose may also result in death.

* **What are the effects of heroin use by pregnant women?**

Heroin passes through the mother's placenta to the fetus. Once the drug reaches the fetus, the baby begins to develop the same chemical dependency on the drug as its mother. Heroine use by pregnant women typically results in neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS). The affected baby is then hospitalized during its early stages of life and placed on medication to diminish the dependency on the opiate. Babies with NAS often experience the following symptoms: excessive crying, fever, irritability, seizures, slow weight gain, tremors, diarrhea and vomiting. Pregnant women that use heroin place their fetus at high risk for other problems related to growth and development. In some cases, death of the baby is the result of the heroin use.

* **Why are heroin users at special risk for contracting HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis?**

When injecting heroin, the shared use of injection supplies, usually syringes, promote the transfer of bodily fluids which increases the chance of transferring viruses and diseases. Hepatitis B and C, HIV and AIDS are three of the most common illnesses contracted through the use of shared syringes. Other entry forms of heroine, like snorting and sniffing, also present the risk of further health consequences. Heroin users often engage in unprotected sexual behaviors, which puts them at a risk for numerous sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and sexually transmitted viruses (STV). It is not uncommon for heroin users to experience multiple illnesses at the same time. This expands the realm of health challenges users may deal with.

* **What are treatments for heroin addiction?**

There are two main treatment methods used to combat heroin addiction: behavioral and pharmacological. Although the individual implementation of each method has been proven to terminate addiction, research suggests the combination of both methods is the most effective. Prior to beginning a long-term treatment program; users will go through a detoxification phase. After the completion of their detoxification phase, the long-term treatment will begin. Past users will typically learn coping methods for stress or whatever initiated their use and use regulated medications to weaken their addiction to opiates.

* **What is the scope of heroin use in the United States?**

As of end year 2012, there were 669,000 heroin users in the United States. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, majority of the increase of heroin use is a result of an increase in first time users in the 18-25 age groups. Today, there are reportedly over one million heroin addicts.

* **What steps should you take if you know someone who uses heroin or you are a heroin user?**

If you are a heroin user, it is extremely important that you understand the effects using heroin has on your body and brain. You also should educate yourself about the risks associated with whichever form(s) of drug intake you participate in and learn what precautions reduce the risk of disease and virus transfer and other serious complications, some that may lead to death. There are many local facilities that provide information about heroin use as well as offer an array of support services for users.

If you suspect heroin use or know someone is using heroin, there are ways you can help ameliorate the situation. It is important to understand what heroin is and the effects it has on the user. This enables you to create a more sophisticated plan of action to deal with the problem. At some point, the problem will need to be addressed. Consult drug treatment facilities for further support. The entire process may be difficult, but the intended outcome to see your friend or loved one in a healthier situation is worth it.