



Australian Government



# OTHER DRUGS (HALLUCINOGENS, KETAMINE AND HEROIN)

There is a wide variety of other dangerous drugs out there that are less commonly used than ecstasy or marijuana. These drugs include heroin, ketamine and hallucinogens like LSD, and psilocybin.

## The effects of these drugs at a glance

### Hallucinogens

Hallucinogens are also known by a variety of other names including acid, trips, wedges, windowpane, blotter, microdot, mushies, blue meanies, magic mushrooms, and gold tops.

#### The signs and symptoms of using hallucinogens:

- trance-like state
- excitation
- euphoria
- increased pulse rate
- insomnia
- hallucinations
- paranoia.

#### The consequences of using hallucinogens may include:

- anxiety
- self-inflicted injury
- unpredictable flashbacks.
- violent behaviour
- paranoia
- depression
- confusion and lack of coordination can result in greater risk of injury
- visual hallucinations may produce anxiety and fear

## **Ketamine (Ketamine hydrochloride)**

Ketamine is also known as green, K, super K, special K, and vitamin K.

### **The signs and symptoms of using ketamine can include:**

- altered perception
- disorientation
- drowsiness
- hallucinations
- numbness
- strange muscle movements
- nausea
- vomiting.

### **The consequences of using ketamine may include:**

- accidents from lack of coordination
- quick development of tolerance
- psychological dependence
- psychosis
- flashbacks
- loss of memory
- attention and vision impairment.

As ketamine is an anaesthetic, when used with depressant drugs such as alcohol, heroin or tranquillisers it can be particularly harmful as it has the potential to cause vital organs such as the lungs or heart to stop functioning.

## **Heroin**

Heroin is one of a group of drugs known as “opioids”. Other opioids include opium, morphine, codeine, pethidine, oxycodone, buprenorphine and methadone. Heroin and other opioids are depressants. Depressants do not necessarily make you feel depressed. Rather, they slow down the activity of the central nervous system and messages going to and from the brain and the body.

Heroin is known by a variety of other names, including horse, hammer, H, dope, smack, junk, gear and boy.

### **The signs and symptoms of using heroin can include:**

- confusion
- decreased blood pressure and heart rate
- dry mouth
- slurred/slow speech
- reduced coordination
- nausea and vomiting
- suppressed cough reflex
- reduced sexual urges
- lethargy
- drowsiness
- constipation
- constricted pupils
- slowed breathing.

### **The consequences of using heroin may include:**

- high risk of addiction
- mood swings
- depression
- menstrual irregularity and infertility in women
- loss of sex drive in men
- anxiety disorders
- chronic constipation
- infection at the site of injections
- HIV and hepatitis infections through needle sharing
- non-fatal overdose
- death from overdose.

## Physical effects of heroin

A central nervous system depressant, heroin actually slows down the brain functions, in particular the control of breathing, which can slow down or even stop. At the same time blood pressure and body temperature drops and the heartbeat can become irregular.

## Problems using heroin

Most heroin is mixed with other substances like glucose, caffeine, sugar and paracetamol, which can cause the end product to be highly poisonous.

In the short term, injecting heroin can result in skin, heart and lung infections, and increases the risk of blood-borne diseases like hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV when sharing needles.

Accidental overdoses are also common, as it is almost impossible for users to tell the purity of the heroin they are using. Overdoses can also happen if too much heroin is injected or it is used in combination with alcohol or other drugs.

Long-term problems can include constipation, irregular periods and infertility in women, loss of sex drive in men, mood swings, depression, and memory impairment.

Other long-term problems can result from users neglecting their general health, being affected by drug impurities and contaminants, and contracting blood borne viruses. Where impurities and contaminants are present in heroin this can lead to collapsed veins, tetanus, abscesses and damage to the heart, liver, lungs and brain.

Women using heroin while pregnant also face a variety of complications. These can include problems with foetal development, increased risk of miscarriage or premature birth, babies being born smaller than average (low birth weight) and the baby being prone to illness.

When taken, heroin can pass through the placenta into the foetus, with the baby experiencing heroin withdrawal after birth. If a mother continues to use heroin while breastfeeding, the drug may be present in breast milk and damage the baby's health.

## Dependence on heroin

People who are physically dependent on heroin can develop a tolerance to the drug. This means more is required to get the same 'rush', eventually leading to a 'dose plateau' where no amount of the drug is enough. Users can also find that their body has become used to functioning with the drug present.

People who are psychologically dependent on heroin find that using it becomes far more important than other activities in their lives. They crave the drug and will find it very difficult to stop using it, or even reduce the amount they use.

If dependent people suddenly stop taking heroin, or drastically reduce the amount they use, they will experience withdrawal symptoms as their bodies readjust to functioning without the drug. Symptoms usually appear within few hours after the last dose, getting stronger and peaking around two to four days later.

Withdrawal symptoms usually subside after six to seven days, but some symptoms such as chronic depression, anxiety, insomnia, loss of appetite, agitation and a continued craving for heroin may last for months and even years.