Hey Alice,

What do you know about heroin? Is it really as addictive as they say? My friend keeps buggin' me to try it, but I'm not sure I want to move from weed to smack. Any guidance would be groovy.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Kudos for seeking some guidance to inform your decision. Addiction is a real danger when it comes to using heroin. Addiction has both a physiological (primarily involving the central nervous system) and a psychological component. If you use weaker heroin for a few weeks, you could develop a mild dependence; use something a little purer for a little while you may find you've got a pretty tough habit to kick.

Heroin belongs to the family of opioids, related to opium, morphine, codeine, methadone, and oxycodone, commonly known as "downers" or sedatives. Heroin is potent and fast-acting. Heroin's reported effects include feelings of warmth, euphoria, contentment, pain relief, dulled emotion, and a dream-like state. With these warm, fuzzy feelings, you may imagine how hard it may be to go back to reality, which may be less than dreamy.

Not so fast ? heroin's undesirable effects may also include nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, constipation, loss of orgasm in women and men, shallow breathing, and going unconscious. A warning label may also inform users to avoid operating heavy machinery or driving because of its numbing effects that may leave them vulnerable. Pleasure seeking and pain reduction may become a consuming way of life for many heroin users. Such an addiction is not cheap to overcome and may be extremely difficult to break.

Heroin users may take "smack" by smoking (often with weed, or marijuana), snorting, or injecting. Intravenous injection poses the greatest risk. Needles deliver substances directly into the bloodstream, and these risk infections, vein damage, blood clots, easier chance of overdose, and other deadly results. If users share needles, it further introduces other risks of HIV, hepatitis C, and many other blood-borne pathogens' transmission.

Movies often show the dark, ugly side of heroin ? OD'ing is a huge risk. As heroin is an unregulated substance, its purity and contents are highly inconsistent, even within one batch. Heroin is also usually cut with other substances that are frequently stronger than heroin, so
overdose is a significant danger, even for experienced users. Most overdoses happen with use of other depressants, like alcohol, or after a break of a couple days from heroin use. If you choose to use heroin, be very cautious and use a small amount.

Putting the chemical aspects aside, what are your motivations to use substances? Is it peer pressure, boredom, or curiosity? May you find other outlets that carry less risk? You may want to consider other highs, like natural highs [5]. Is substance use to escape a stressful reality? If so, would substance use solve any real issues? There may be other ways to handle stress and anxiety with other ways to cope [6].

You are ultimately in charge of your body and your health, and it's best to make well, thought out decisions. For more information about heroin, check out the drug facts [7] from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Please discuss with your friend information you learn and your motivations. Perhaps taking more things into consideration will lead to even more groovy times!

Alice!
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