

Opiates Addiction



Opiates (opioid) Addiction

Introduction

Opioids, also called opiates, are a class of drug. This class includes drugs derived from the opium poppy, such as morphine and codeine. It also includes synthetic or partially synthetic formulas, such as Vicodin, Percodan, oxycodone, and heroin. Many opioids are used to treat pain.

Some opioids, such as oxycodone, codeine, and morphine, are prescription pain medications. Using these medications for recreation or in a way not recommended by a doctor can be considered abuse. Other opioids, like heroin, are illegal.

Opioids are highly addictive. Abuse can quickly lead to addiction. Both abuse and addiction can cause serious health problems, including death. Opioids can be used in a variety of ways. They can be taken orally, inhaled through the nose, injected into a vein, or smoked in a cigarette. Prescription forms are sometimes used as suppositories. Effects may depend on the method of consumption. The type of opioid also determines its effect.

Opioids impact the brain, leading to temporary feelings of intense pleasure. Addiction to opioids can develop very quickly, even with minimal use. The addiction can be physical, in that a habitual user's body craves the drug. It can also be mental, in that a user consciously desires the drug's effects. A person who is addicted to opioids will do whatever it takes to get more of the drug, regardless of the risks or consequences.

Long-term opioid use has serious health consequences, including brain damage. Opioid abuse can impair the brain's production of natural painkillers and dopamine (the brain's "feel-good" chemical).

Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of opioid abuse and addiction include:

- an increased tolerance for the drug
- an inability to stop or reduce usage withdrawal symptoms when you stop using
- a desire to keep using even when health complications arise
- an impact on quality of life, including relationships and employment spending excess time and money on drugs
- excessive sleeping or extreme weight loss or gain
- turning to crime to pay for more opiates.

If someone who is addicted to opioids stops using, he or she may have withdrawal symptoms including anxiety, sweating, insomnia, agitation, tremors, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and extreme mental and physical discomfort. Even people with a very minor dependence on prescription opioids can suffer from withdrawal. The length and intensity of withdrawal depends on the type of opioid the user is addicted to, the length of the addiction, and the typical doses.

Longtime addicts may wish to consult with a medical professional before quitting.

Diagnosis

To diagnose an opioid addiction, your doctor will discuss your current usage and health history. He or she will determine the degree of your dependence and help suggest treatment options. Someone who seeks treatment for opioid addiction must commit to stopping.

Causes and Risk Factors

Using opioids, especially in a way not prescribed by a doctor, can cause addiction. Opioids are highly addictive, so even infrequent use can lead to physical dependence. Habitual opioid use causes changes in the brain, specifically in the pain center. This brings on addiction. Anyone who uses opioids is at risk for developing an addiction. The best way to prevent an addiction is to avoid all illegal drugs, and to use prescribed painkillers only as recommended by medical professionals.

While opioid use is a choice, some factors may increase risk of addiction. People with a family history of drug dependence and those who grow up in certain social or economic situations could be more at risk. Also, people who abuse alcohol or other drugs or who have a mental illness have an increased risk of opioid dependence.

Treatment

Opioid addiction is a complex disease, with physical, mental, social, and environmental factors. To be successful, treatment plans must address all these components. In some cases, hospitalization may be required.

Detoxification

Detoxification is often the first attempt at treatment. It is done in combination with other treatment options. It includes supervised withdrawal from the drug, with support and medication to help with the withdrawal symptoms. Detoxification alone is rarely successful in treating opioid addiction. Some people will suffer from tremors, hallucinations, confusion, delirium, intense anxiety, sleep disturbances, and body pain while detoxing.

Medication

Some opioid addicts have success with taking milder prescription opioids, such as methadone or buprenorphine, and slowly lowering the dose to wean themselves off the drug. This process, known as replacement therapy, is a common treatment for opioid addiction. Other medications may be used to lessen the withdrawal symptoms or cravings.

Treatment Facilities

Residential treatment programs work to deal with all facets of an addiction. These programs often include support groups, vocational rehab, and therapy. Programs can last for a few weeks or several months.

Sources

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/heroin-abuse-addiction/what-are-treatments-heroin-addiction>

<http://www.timberlineknolls.com/drug-addiction/heroin/signs-effects>

<http://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/heroin/international-statistics.html>