

Heroin Withdrawal : The Pains of Addiction and Withdrawal, a Timeline

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It's no secret that heroin addiction is on the rise. An epidemic of abuse is [plaguing the country](#) and is prevalent in all states. Even in today's day and age, the number of people using heroin for the first time is high; nearly the number of people who started heroin use in 2016 is nearly double the number of first-time users in 2006⁵. What happens when it's time to quit? What is the heroin withdrawal timeline like?

To comprehend the power of [heroin addiction](#), the timing and intensity of heroin withdrawal must be understood. After an addict injects, snorts or smokes heroin, the initial euphoric feeling can be described as a "rush" – an upwelling of sensation that can be accompanied by a dry mouth as well as a "warm" sensation. After a while, the user experiences feelings of apathy and decreased bodily movement².

Any euphoric feelings or sought-after high are indeed short-lived. Heroin is a short-acting drug, which means that while the desired high takes effect rapidly, it also leaves the

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bloodstream [24/7 Detox & Treatment Help](#) (938) 666-1632. Due to its short-acting nature, it can lead to a quick-onset of withdrawal symptoms usually occur as soon as 8-12 hours after the last dose of heroin².

Heroin Withdrawal

Within 8-12 hours, once the drowsiness and apathy have begun to fade, the craving for more heroin begins to take hold. This dependency is a result of neurochemical and molecular changes in the brain. If the addict does not inject or take another hit of heroin, he or she will start to experience intensely unpleasant withdrawal symptoms⁴.

As previously stated, the [withdrawal symptoms from heroin](#) usually occur within 8-12 hours. For some heavy users, symptoms can begin as quickly as 4 hours after the last “hit.” These symptoms can range from mild to severe. The intensity of heroin withdrawal will vary by the amount of heroin consumed, duration and frequency of use, as well as the user’s overall health.

Some of the effects of withdrawal may include²:

- Sweats
- Chills
- Nausea
- Cramping
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Rapid heart rate
- Muscle spasms

The peak of withdrawal occurs two to three days after the last dose of heroin, with the symptoms beginning to subside after about a week².

However, some symptoms can persist for weeks or even months, often leading to return to active use of the drug. This is coined Post-Acute Withdrawal Syndrome (or Protracted Abstinence Syndrome).

Symptoms of Post-Acute Withdrawal include insomnia, depression, impaired concentration, anorexia, and fatigue. These prolonged symptoms quickly lead to relapse. Therefore, awareness and management of these protracted symptoms is fundamental to maintaining sobriety⁶.

The timeframe or severity of heroin withdrawal can actually be proxy measured by measuring the size of the addict’s pupils⁶. If the user’s pupils are large (or dilated), that is an indication that they are experiencing acute heroin withdrawal. However, as time passes and withdrawal symptoms fade, the pupils will get smaller and eventually return to normal. This measurement is observed in the Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale as one of the items to score a user in terms of withdrawal severity⁶.

Managing Withdrawal

Withdrawal from heroin isn’t considered life-threatening in and of itself. Heroin addicts are most likely to die overdosing from heroin, rather than from quitting heroin and experiencing withdrawal¹. However, withdrawal symptoms may still be medically significant and/or lead to complications. Heroin withdrawal is not something that should be taken lightly or attempted alone. It is highly recommended that an addict get the support of [professional medical and/](#)

[or mental health](#) 24/7 Detox & Treatment Help can help manage the side-effects from withdrawal in a safe environment [\(938\) 666-1632](tel:(938)666-1632)

The potential for crippling withdrawal symptoms within hours is why heroin proves to be such a dangerous drug. This quick onset of withdrawal compels the addict to consume more and more, perpetually, in order to avoid this excruciating state. The very drug causing the pain becomes the only recourse to alleviate it. One of the most frightening aspects of heroin is the reality that a user can become sucked into this cycle of addiction after only one use².

The dated perception of the heroin addict as a junkie in an alley is no longer applicable. The drug knows no economic, racial, or gender boundaries. This increase in abuse is in large part because it is now more easily available throughout cities as well as suburbs. It is also available in forms that are easier to consume by smoking or snorting. However, while inhaling something through the mouth or nose may make the drug appear less dangerous than injecting it, heroin is just as addictive regardless of how the high is achieved⁵.

The intense desire to recapture that initial euphoric sensation, coupled with the pain of withdrawal closing in on the addict within hours and lasting for days, leads to a deadly combination ending in [heroin addiction](#). The horror of experiencing heroin withdrawal propels addicts to continue using, even as their bodies, minds, and lives catastrophically deteriorate. It is an extremely addictive drug that enslaves its users in a cycle of dependency and more often than not ends in a fatal overdose.

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