

# Opioids & Heroin



## What are Opioids? Opiates? Heroin? Fentanyl?

**Opiates** are derived from the seed pod of the Asian opium poppy plant. Patients with severe or chronic pain may be prescribed opioid-based medications such as morphine, oxycodone, or hydrocodone.

At one time “opioids” referred to synthetic opiates only (drugs created to emulate opium, however different chemically). Now the term **opioid** is used for the entire family of opiates including natural, synthetic and semi-synthetic.

**Fentanyl** is used to treat patients with severe pain or to manage pain after surgery in hospitals or prescribed as a patch. As a street drug, it is an illegally produced compound and may be mixed with heroin or pressed into a pill to make it a more potent product. Many of the overdose deaths are being caused by fentanyl.

**Heroin** is also derived from poppy plants. It is usually found as a white or brown powder or black sticky substance (“black tar heroin”).

## How are opioids & heroin used?

Heroin & opioids can be injected, inhaled or smoked. Any method of heroin use can cause immediate harm and lead to addiction.

## Why Do People Use Opioids?

A number of people with severe or chronic pain are legitimately prescribed opioid-based medications and most are able to use them appropriately. However, for some individuals, they develop an addiction and, after their prescriptions are stopped, may resort to street medications and heroin to cope with their pain and addiction. Other people start using these substances for a variety of reasons: to cope with physical/emotional pain and traumas; peer pressure to experiment; self-medication for untreated mental health problems; and to obtain feelings of pleasure and well-being.

## Health Effects of Heroin Use

Risks of heroin use include death, dependency, deterioration of the brain’s white matter, spontaneous abortion, infectious diseases such as hepatitis and HIV. Chronic users may develop collapsed veins, infection of heart lining and valves, abscesses, constipation, liver or kidney disease.

## Why Do Some People Become Addicted?

There are a number of genetic, biological, social and psychological factors that contribute to people developing an addiction. People who have experienced trauma and who lack social supports are at an increased risk for developing an addiction. The earlier that drug use begins, the more likely it will progress to serious abuse. It is a complex disease that requires much more than a strong will or good intentions to stop. Although the initial decision to take drugs is voluntary, the brain changes that occur over time challenge a person’s ability to stop.

## Signs of a heroin overdose include:

Shallow breathing, pinpoint pupils, clammy skin, convulsions, coma. **Call 911.**

## Naloxone (Narcan) Available

Project Dawn is a community-based overdose education and naloxone distribution program through the Portage County Health Department. Naloxone is a medication that can reverse an overdose caused by an opioid drug.

Contact the Health Department for more information and to make an appointment.

705 Oakwood St., 2nd floor, Ravenna  
330-296-9919



[www.mental-health-recovery.org](http://www.mental-health-recovery.org) • 330.673.1756

## Myths!

### **Once a person uses heroin they are hooked for life and there is no hope. NOT TRUE!**

Recovery is possible for those who develop an addiction. Treatment and recovery are an ongoing process that require time. The first step is getting help.

### **More than anything else, drug addiction is a character flaw. NOT TRUE!**

Drug addiction is a brain disease. Drugs can cause changes in the molecules and cells that make up the brain, that result in mood changes, changes in memory processes, and in such motor skills as walking and talking. These changes have a huge influence on all aspects of a person's behavior. The drug becomes the single most powerful motivator in a drug abuser's existence. Similar to other chronic diseases like diabetes, addiction can be managed although relapses are common and are part of the recovery process.

### **Abstinence is the only true recovery method. Medication Assisted Treatment is just replacing one drug for another. NOT TRUE!**

Medications such as Suboxone and Vivitrol are prescribed or administered under monitored, controlled conditions and are safe and effective for treating opioid addiction. They reduce drug cravings and prevent relapse without causing a "high." The medications are used in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies to provide a whole patient approach to treating addiction.

## Treatment & Recovery

Recovery is possible for those who are dependent on heroin and other opioids. Drug addiction is a complex illness, and there is not just one solution to fit everyone. Effective treatment plans incorporate many components and should be assessed continually and modified to meet changing needs.

Relapse is possible and it is important for families to understand that recovery from a substance use disorder can be a long-term process requiring multiple episodes of treatment. Many drug addicted individuals also have mental illnesses that need to be treated.



## Portage County Treatment & Services

Recovery work starts with a phone call or visit to the following local agencies.

### **Townhall II**

155 N. Water St, Kent  
330-678-3006

#### **Call for:**

Detox  
Comprehensive Assessment  
Individual & Group Counseling  
Residential Treatment for Women

### **Family & Community Services**

143 Gougler Ave, Kent  
330-677-4124

#### **Call for:**

Comprehensive Assessment  
Individual & Group Counseling  
Residential Treatment for Men  
Recovery Housing

### **Coleman Professional Services**

5982 Rhodes Rd, Kent  
330-673-1347

#### **Call for:**

Comprehensive Assessment  
Individual & Group Counseling  
Mental Health & Alcohol/Drug  
Vivitrol