



THE TRUTH ABOUT

# PAINKILLERS

Dillies  
Percs  
Juice  
Hillbilly Heroin

[drugfreeworld.org](http://drugfreeworld.org)

## WHY THIS BOOKLET WAS PRODUCED

**T**here is a lot of talk about drugs in the world—on the streets, at school, on the Internet and TV. Some of it is true, some not.

Much of what you hear about drugs actually comes from those selling them. Reformed drug dealers have confessed they would have said anything to get others to buy drugs.

Don't be fooled. You need facts to avoid becoming hooked on drugs and to help your friends stay off them. That is why we have prepared this booklet—for you.

Your feedback is important to us, so we look forward to hearing from you. You can visit us on the web at [drugfreeworld.org](http://drugfreeworld.org) and e-mail us at [info@drugfreeworld.org](mailto:info@drugfreeworld.org).

# Prescription PAINKILLER Abuse

**B**eyond the use of street drugs in the UK and Ireland, there is the abuse of prescription painkillers. Painkiller dependence affects as many as one in ten British adults. In the UK, 8 percent of 16 to 19 year olds have abused prescription painkillers. In Ireland, nearly 20 percent of young adults ages 15 to 24 misused painkillers, whether obtained illicitly or by prescription.

Among teens, prescription drugs are the most commonly used drugs next to marijuana, and almost half of the teens abusing prescription drugs are taking painkillers.

Why are so many young people turning to prescription drugs to get high? By survey, almost 50% of teens believe that taking prescription drugs is much safer than using illegal street drugs.

What is not known by most of these young people is the risk they are taking by consuming these highly potent and mind-altering drugs. Long-term use of painkillers can lead to dependence, even for people who are prescribed them to relieve a medical condition but eventually fall into the trap of abuse and addiction.

In some cases, the dangers of painkillers don't surface until it is too late. In 2007, for example, abuse of the painkiller Fentanyl killed more than 1,000 people. The drug was found to be 30 to 50 times more powerful than heroin.





# What are PAINKILLERS?


A photograph of a field of opium poppies. In the foreground, a large, dark, unopened poppy flower is in focus. Behind it, several other poppies are in various stages of bloom, some with bright yellow centers. A stone path leads from the bottom right towards the background, where more poppies and trees are visible under a bright sky.

**P**rescription painkillers are powerful drugs that interfere with the nervous system's transmission of the nerve signals we perceive as pain. Most painkillers also stimulate portions of the brain associated with pleasure. Thus, in addition to blocking pain, they produce a "high."

The most powerful prescription painkillers are called opioids, which are opium-like\* compounds. They are manufactured to react on the nervous system in the same way as drugs derived from the opium poppy, like heroin. The most commonly abused opioid painkillers include oxycodone, hydrocodone, meperidine, hydromorphone and propoxyphene.

\* opium: a brownish, gummy extract from the opium poppy.





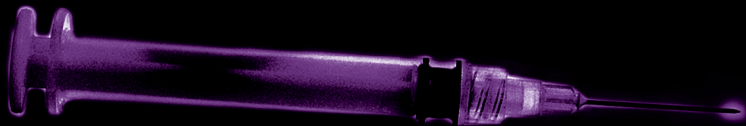
**Oxycodone** has the greatest potential for abuse and the greatest dangers. It is as powerful as heroin and affects the nervous system the same way. Oxycodone is sold under many trade names, such as Percodan, Endodan, Roxiprin, Percocet, Endocet, Roxicet and OxyContin. It comes in tablet form.

**Hydrocodone** is used in combination with other chemicals and is available in prescription pain medications as tablets, capsules and syrups. Trade names include Anexsia, Dicodid, Hycodan, Hycomine, Lorcet, Lortab, Norco, Tussionex and Vicodin. Sales and production of

this drug have increased significantly in recent years, as has its illicit use.

**Meperidine** (brand name Demerol) and hydromorphone (Dilaudid) come in tablets and propoxyphene (Darvon) in capsules, but all three have been known to be crushed and injected, snorted or smoked. Darvon, banned in the UK since 2005, is among the top ten drugs reported in drug abuse deaths in the US. Dilaudid, considered eight times more potent than morphine, is often called “drug store heroin” on the streets.

"At the age of 20, I became an addict to a narcotic\* which began with a prescription following a surgery. In the weeks that followed [the operation] in addition to orally abusing the tablet, crushing it up enabled me to destroy the controlled release mechanism and to swallow or snort the drug. It can also be injected to produce a feeling identical to shooting heroin. The physical withdrawal from the drug is nothing short of agonising pain."  
—James



\* narcotic: a drug affecting the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord), which can cause dizziness, lack of coordination and unconsciousness.

# Street Names for Painkillers

## Generic Name

Oxycodone

## Brand Name

OxyContin, Percodan,  
Percocet, Roxiprin,  
Roxicet, Endodan,  
Endocet

## Street Name

Oxy 80s, oxycotton,  
oxycet, hillbilly heroin,  
percs, perks

Hydrocodone

Anexsia, Dicodid,  
Hycodan, Hycomine,  
Lorcet, Lortab, Norco,  
Tussionex, Vicodin

pain killer, vikes,  
hydros

Propoxyphene

Darvon

pinks, footballs, pink  
footballs, yellow  
footballs, 65's, Ns

Hydromorphone

Dilaudid

juice, dillies, drugstore  
heroin

Meperidine

Demerol

demmies, pain killer





# Understanding Why Painkillers Become So ADDICTIVE

**O**pioid painkillers produce a short-lived euphoria, but they are also addictive.

Long-term use of painkillers can lead to physical dependence. The body adapts to the presence of the substance and if one stops taking the drug abruptly, withdrawal symptoms occur. Or the body could build up

a tolerance to the drug, meaning that higher doses have to be taken to achieve the same effects.

Like all drugs, painkillers simply mask the pain for which they are taken. They don't "cure" anything. Someone continuously trying to dull the pain may find himself taking higher and

**"I am addicted to prescription pain medication.**

I first started taking prescription painkillers [some] years ago when my doctor prescribed them to treat post-surgical pain following spinal surgery.... Over the past several years I have tried to break my dependence on pain pills and, in fact, twice checked myself into medical facilities in an attempt to do so. [I have] recently agreed with my physician about the next steps."

— Excerpted from radio commentator Rush Limbaugh's on-air statement, Friday, Oct. 10, 2003, according to Premiere Radio, his broadcaster.

**Family members protest deadly painkillers. Rehab experts say addiction to powerful painkillers such as OxyContin is among the hardest of all to kick.**

higher doses—only to discover that he cannot make it through the day without the drug.

Symptoms of withdrawal can include restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhoea, vomiting, cold flashes with goose bumps (known as “cold turkey”), and involuntary leg movements.

One of the serious risks of opioids is respiratory depression—high doses can cause breathing to slow down to the point it stops and the user dies.



# OxyContin

## The “Hillbilly Heroin”

**B**ecause it reacts on the nervous system like heroin or opium, some abusers are using one brand of oxycodone painkiller, OxyContin, as a substitute for, or supplement to, street opiates like heroin.


Armed robberies of pharmacies have occurred where the robber demanded only OxyContin, not cash. In some areas, particularly the Eastern United States, OxyContin has been the drug of greatest concern to law enforcement authorities.

OxyContin, widely known as “hillbilly heroin” because of its abuse in Appalachian

communities, has emerged as a major crime problem in the US. In one county, it was estimated that addiction to this drug was behind 80% of the crime.





A woman with long, dark hair is leaning her head against a chain-link fence at night. She has her eyes closed and a pained or exhausted expression. Her hands are clasped together near her neck. The scene is dimly lit, with some light reflecting off the fence and her face. The background is dark, suggesting an outdoor setting at night.

“I didn’t think I had a ‘drug’ problem—I was buying the tablets at the chemist. It didn’t affect my work. I would feel a bit tired in the mornings, but nothing more. The fact that I had a problem came to a head when I took an overdose of about 40 tablets and found myself in the hospital. I spent 12 weeks in the clinic conquering my addiction.”

—Alex

“Pretty much as long as I can remember I’ve had highs and lows. I would get easily upset by the littlest things, **I would have anger outbursts,** or hate someone for no reason at all. For a long while I had thought I was bipolar. I started using drugs last October to help me with my unwanted feelings. But believe it or not, **it just made stuff worse!** I had to now deal with my addiction and my emotional problems.”

—Thomas

# Mental & Physiological Effects of Painkillers

- constipation
- nausea
- vomiting
- dizziness
- confusion
- addiction
- unconsciousness
- respiratory depression
- increased risk of heart attack
- coma
- death





# Painkillers: A SHORT HISTORY

Opiates, originally derived from the opium poppy, have been used for thousands of years for both recreational and medicinal purposes. The most active substance in opium is morphine—named after Morpheus, the Greek god of dreams. Morphine is a very powerful painkiller, but it is also very addictive.

In the 16th century, laudanum, opium prepared in an alcoholic solution, was used as a painkiller.

Morphine was first extracted from opium in a pure form in the early 19th century. It was used widely as a painkiller during the American Civil War, and many soldiers became addicted.

**Highly addictive opiates, derived from the opium poppy, have been used for thousands of years for both recreational and medicinal purposes.**



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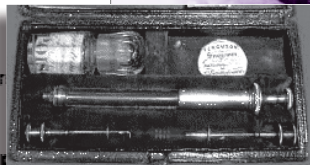
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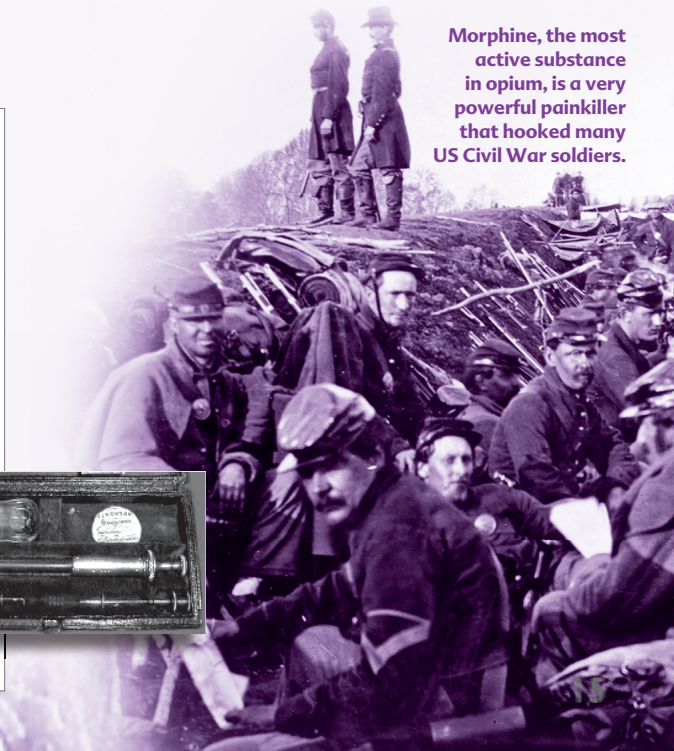
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Morphine, the most active substance in opium, is a very powerful painkiller that hooked many US Civil War soldiers.





A bottle of codeine tablets—all opiates temporarily relieve pain but are highly addictive.

Codeine, a less powerful drug that is found in opium but can be synthesised (man-made), was first isolated in 1830 in France by Jean-Pierre Robiquet, to replace raw opium for medical purposes. It is used mainly as a cough remedy.

Throughout the early 19th century, the recreational use of opium grew and by 1830, the British dependence on the drug reached an all-time high. The British sent warships to the coast of China in 1839 in response to China's attempt to suppress the opium traffic, beginning the "First Opium War."

In 1874, chemists trying to find a less addictive form of morphine made heroin. But heroin had twice the potency of morphine, and heroin addiction soon became a serious problem.

The US Congress banned opium in 1905 and the next year passed the Pure Food and Drug Act requiring contents labelling on all medicines.

Methadone was first synthesised in 1937 by German scientists Max Bockmühl and







# International Statistics

**A**mong those using illicit drugs for the first time in 2007, the most popular substances were marijuana and prescription painkillers—each used by roughly the same number of Americans aged 12 and older. Non-medical use of painkillers rose 12%.

Nearly one in ten 16 to 19 year olds in the UK have abused prescription painkillers.

Misuse of painkillers represents three-quarters of the overall problem of prescription drug abuse. The painkiller hydrocodone is the most commonly diverted and abused controlled pharmaceutical in the US.

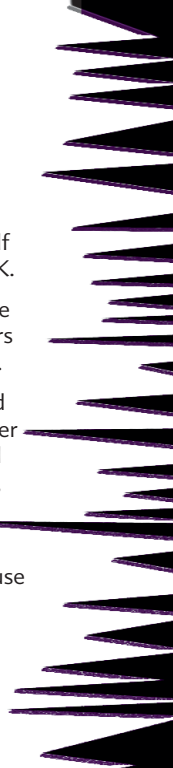
Methadone, used in addiction treatment centres and now used by doctors as a painkiller,

was found to be the cause of over half the painkiller-related deaths in the UK.

In the UK, tens of thousands of people are said to be dependent on painkillers such as Solpadeine and Nurofen Plus.

Statistics from the Republic of Ireland in May 2008 revealed that the number of people addicted to Solpadeine and Nurofen Plus, who sought treatment, had more than doubled in two years.

Doctors and rehabilitation therapists report that prescription painkiller abuse is one of the most difficult addictions to treat.



# Warning Signs of Prescription Painkiller Dependency

**M**ost commonly prescribed painkillers (OxyContin, Vicodin, Methadone, Darvocet, Lortab, Lorcet and Percocet), while offering relief from pain, can also cause individuals' bodies to start "needing" the drugs in order to feel just "normal."

Here are ten warning signs to watch for if you think someone you know may be experiencing a dependency on these drugs:

1. Usage increase: increase of one's dose over time, as a result of growing tolerant to the drug and needing more to get the same effect.
2. Change in personality: shifts in energy, mood, and concentration as a result of everyday responsibilities becoming secondary to the need for the drug.
3. Social withdrawal: withdrawal from family and friends.
4. Ongoing use: continued use of painkillers after the medical condition they were meant to relieve has improved.
5. Time spent on obtaining prescriptions: spending large amounts of time driving great distances and visiting multiple doctors to obtain the drugs.
6. Change in daily habits and appearance: decline in personal hygiene; change in sleeping and eating habits; constant cough, running nose and red, glazed eyes.
7. Neglects responsibilities: neglect of household chores and bills; calling in sick to school or work more often.
8. Increased sensitivity: normal sights, sounds and emotions becoming overly stimulating to the person; hallucinations.
9. Blackouts and forgetfulness: forgetting events that have taken place and experiencing blackouts.
10. Defensiveness: becoming defensive and lashing out in response to simple questions in an attempt to hide a drug dependency, if users feel their secret is being discovered.

# The Truth About Drugs

**D**rugs are essentially poisons. The amount taken determines the effect.

A small amount acts as a stimulant (speeds you up). A greater amount acts as a sedative (slows you down). An even larger amount poisons and can kill.

This is true of any drug. Only the amount needed to achieve the effect differs.

But many drugs have another liability: they directly affect the mind. They can distort the user's perception of what is happening around him or her. As a result, the person's actions may be odd, irrational, inappropriate and even destructive.

Drugs block off all sensations, the desirable ones with the unwanted. So, while providing short-term help in the relief of pain, they also wipe out ability and alertness and muddy one's thinking.

Medicines are drugs that are intended to speed up or slow down or change something about the way your body is working, to try to make it work better. Sometimes they are necessary. But they are still drugs: they act as stimulants or sedatives, and too much can kill you. So if you do not use medicines as they are supposed to be used, they can be as dangerous as illegal drugs.

**The real answer is to get  
the facts and not to take  
drugs in the first place.**





## WHY DO PEOPLE TAKE DRUGS?

People take drugs because they want to change something in their lives.

Here are some of the reasons young people have given for taking drugs:

- To fit in
- To escape or relax
- To relieve boredom
- To seem grown up
- To rebel
- To experiment

They think drugs are a solution. But eventually, the drugs become the problem.

Difficult as it may be to face one's problems, the consequences of drug use are always worse than the problem one is trying to solve with them. The real answer is to get the facts and not to take drugs in the first place.



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Millions of copies of booklets such as this have been distributed to people around the world in 22 languages. As new drugs appear on the streets and more information about their effects becomes known, existing booklets are updated and new ones created.

The booklets are published by the Foundation for a Drug-Free World, a nonprofit public benefit organisation headquartered in Los Angeles, California.

The Foundation provides educational materials, advice and coordination for its international drug prevention network. It works with youth, parents, educators, volunteer organisations and government agencies—anyone with an interest in helping people lead lives free from drug abuse.

# FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

This booklet is one in a series of publications that cover the facts about marijuana, alcohol, Ecstasy, cocaine, crack cocaine, crystal meth and methamphetamine, inhalants, heroin, LSD and prescription drug abuse. Armed with this information, the reader can make the decision to live a drug-free life.

**For more information or to obtain more copies of this or other booklets in this series, contact:**



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