

# Pain Medication To Heroin

## The Leap May Be Shorter Than You Think

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The danger of heroin addiction is greater than anyone realizes and easier than one imagines. Studies show, that some people who are addicted to heroin often started out abusing prescription painkillers such as Percocet, Darvocet, OxyContin, codeine and others.

Three out of four people using heroin began with the use of

prescription medication according to recent studies. The use of prescription medication to ease pain has become a common practice. Enough pain medication prescriptions were written in 2012 – 259 million – for every adult in America to have a bottle of pills. And that number is growing annually.

Prescribing pain medication crosses all fields of medicine as people increasingly want to avoid pain. In a survey conducted by the American Dental Association, 85% of oral surgeons said they almost always

prescribed opioids for pain relief. In a survey by the *Journal of Maxillofacial Surgery*, only two out of 384 respondents did not prescribe narcotics after removing impacted teeth.

Taken as prescribed and for a short amount of time, opioids may help manage pain. However, prolonged use may lead to physical dependence and the risk of addiction. Prescription medication misuse has grown to epidemic proportions and is accompanied with a high cost. In 2014 alone, it was estimated that, nationally, the overall economic



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price tag of opioid abuse, including health care, crime, productivity and rehab, was \$193 billion.

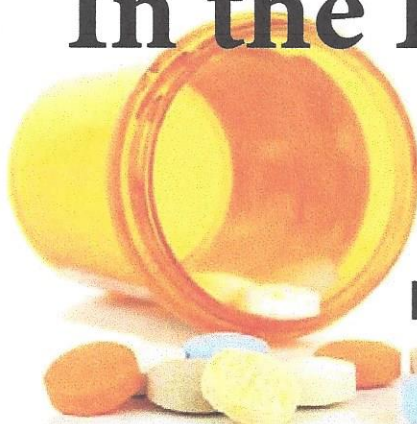
Painkillers and heroin belong to the same class of drugs called opioids. Opioids attach to specific molecules called opioid receptors, which are found on nerve cells in the brain, spinal cord, intestines and other organs. When painkillers or heroin attach to these receptors, they can decrease the feeling of pain. Opioids can also cause a person to feel relaxed and happy, which is the reason some people abuse the medication.

Whenever pain becomes an issue, even in dentistry for oral surgery, wisdom teeth removal or other dental procedures, studies show more pain medication is being prescribed than is needed. It is also an opportunity for others to share your medication when you are not looking. To avoid complications it is important to:

- Take prescription medication only as prescribed.
- Never mix painkillers with alcohol or sleeping pills.
- Store your medication in a safe place to avoid others “sharing” your meds.
- Dispose of unused medication properly. The Howard County Police Department currently has three drop-off locations.
- Discuss any concerns with your doctor.

Dependence often begins as tolerance; the need to take higher doses of a medication to get the same effect. Most Howard County residents do not plan to use heroin, but they might readily take prescription medication to avoid pain. Sometimes, there is a very thin line between the two forms of opioids. With a growing number of people abusing opioids, doctors and patients must remain vigilant.

## In the KNOW ...



Three out of four people using heroin began with the use of prescription medication

### What you should KNOW ...

- ☛ **Don't share your meds**  
In a recent study, 23% of the people interviewed loaned prescription medicines to others and about 27% borrowed them.
- ☛ **Know who has access to your meds**  
Studies show that two-thirds of teens who abuse prescription drugs are getting them from cabinets in the home.
- ☛ **Talk to your doctor**  
Nearly half of all Americans have used at least one prescription drug in the past month — often unnecessarily. Ask questions.

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### The Face of Prescription Medicine Misuse



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