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Opium

What is Opium?

Opium is a highly addictive narcotic drug acquired in the dried latex form the opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) seed pod. Heroin is derived from the morphine alkaloid found in opium.

Traditionally the unripened pod is slit open and the sap seeps out and dries on the outer surface of the pod. The resulting yellow-brown latex, which is scraped off of the pod, is bitter in taste and contains varying amounts of alkaloids such as [morphine](#), [codeine](#), thebaine and [papaverine](#).

Other synthetic or semisynthetic opium derivatives include [fentanyl](#), [methadone](#), [oxycodone](#) and hydrocodone.

In the U.S., opium is rarely grown and cultivated for illicit commercial use. Most supplies in the U.S. come from Latin American and Afghanistan. Afghanistan is the worldwide capital of opium cultivation, leading to about three-quarters of the world's heroin supply.

Opium History

Opium's history dates back to 3400 B.C., when the first records of its cultivation and use are known.

- It was used by the ancient Greeks and Romans as a potent pain reliever. It was grown in Southeast Asia and known as the "joy plant", or Hul Gil, by the Sumerians.
- The Assyrians and the Egyptians also cultivated opium, and it traveled along the Silk Road (a series of travel routes) between Europe and China where it was involved in the beginning of the Opium Wars of the 1800s.
- Opium dens were places where opium could be bought and sold, and were also found worldwide, especially in Southeast Asia, China and Europe.
- In the U.S. in the 1800's, opium dens sprang up in the west, such as in San Francisco's Chinatown, and spread east to New York. Chinese immigrants who came to the U.S. for railroad and the gold rush work often brought their opium with them for its intoxicating and pain-relieving effects.

Poppy seeds and drug testing

The [poppy plant](#) is a flowering plant that is used in the garden for its beautiful flowers, often red, pink, purple, orange or white. Poppy seeds are used in baking and can be purchased in the spice section at the grocery. Poppy seeds may be used in cakes and on top of bagels commercially.

Poppy seeds do have small amounts of opium content and eating poppy seeds may rarely yield a positive result on drug tests. Usually, most of the opium is removed from the poppy seeds during processing. However, according to the U.S.

Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), drug testing will account for the morphine threshold level. According to the [USADA](#), morphine and codeine may be detected in the urine up to 2 days after consuming poppy seeds from baked items such as pastries, bagels, muffins, and cakes. WADA-accredited laboratories mark a urine sample as positive for morphine when the level exceeds 1.3 micrograms/mL.

[Opium Tincture \(Paregoric\)](#) is a prescription medication in the opioid class, and is classified as a Schedule II or III narcotic. This medication is used to decrease control diarrhea by the reducing the number and frequency of bowel movements. It works by increasing smooth muscle tone and decreasing fluid secretions in the intestines. This slows the movement of bowel matter through the intestines.

Heroin abuse

Heroin (diacetylmorphine) is derived from the morphine alkaloid found in opium and is roughly 2 to 3 times more potent. A highly addictive drug, heroin exhibits euphoric ("rush"), anxiolytic and analgesic central nervous system properties.

[Heroin](#) is classified as a Schedule I drug under the [Controlled Substances Act](#) of 1970 and as such has no acceptable medical use in the United States.

Pure heroin is a white powder that tastes bitter. Because heroin abusers do not know the actual strength of the drug or its true contents, they are at risk of overdose or death.

- Most illicit heroin is sold as a white or brownish powder and may be "cut" with other substances such as sugar, starch, powdered milk, or quinine. It can also be cut with strychnine or other poisons.
- Another form of heroin known as "black tar" may be sticky, like roofing tar, or hard, like coal. Its color may vary from dark brown to black. This form is smoked or snorted up the nose.
- Recently, more potent opioids such as fentanyl and carfentanyl have been found "cut" into heroin sold on the streets, and can be deadly to unsuspecting users. Death have been reported.

Heroin methods of use

Heroin which is derived from opium is most often injected, however, it may also be vaporized (or smoked), sniffed (also known as snorting), used as a rectal suppository, or orally ingested by mouth.

- Smoking, snorting or orally ingesting heroin does not produce an intense "rush" as might be experienced with intravenous (IV) injection.
- Oral ingestion does not usually lead to a "rush", but use of heroin in suppository form may have intense euphoric effects.
- Heroin can be strongly addictive by any given route, and its use can be hard to overcome.

Learn more: [Heroin and Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder](#)

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Sources

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