

## LAWS ON HEROIN USE AND DRIVING

In Victoria, it is an offence to drive while under the influence of any drug to such an extent as to be incapable of having proper control of the motor vehicle. This includes the use of illegal drugs such as heroin.

It is also an offence to drive while **impaired** by a drug.

If police suspect a driver is impaired due to the use of drugs, they may require the driver to undergo an assessment of impairment. A video recording is made of the assessment process and a copy is provided for the driver undertaking the assessment. The standard impairment assessment consists of four components:

### 1. Interview and observation

This component consists of a standardised series of questions, examining the circumstances that led to police intervention, the driver's history of illness, injury, medical treatment and drug use.

### 2. Physical impairment tests

These consist of three scientifically validated tests of physical ability. When conducted by a trained practitioner, these tests identify impairment to driver ability at a level that would be equivalent to a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of 0.10 or above.

### 3. Information review process

This process evaluates all the information gathered from the interview and observation component and the physical impairment tests.

### 4. Evaluation

Based on all the information gathered, the assessor determines whether impairment may be drug related. If the assessor believes that the impairment may be drug related, the assessor may require a blood and/or urine sample to be provided by the driver. A doctor or nurse will take this. A copy of the results will be provided to the driver.

If analysis of blood and/or urine samples indicates that the person was impaired by drugs, he or she may be charged. If the impairment was not drug related, an administrative review will be undertaken. This will determine what action can be taken so that the driver and other road users are not exposed to the dangers of impaired driving.

Penalties for a person convicted of driving while drug impaired are:

- :: a minimum of 12 months licence cancellation and a maximum penalty of \$2500.

Penalties for refusing to provide blood and/or urine samples, or to undertake the assessment of drug impairment are:

- :: for a first offence—a minimum of two years disqualification from driving, plus a fine
- :: for subsequent offences—a minimum of four years disqualification from driving, plus a fine.

## REINSTATEMENT OF A DRIVING LICENCE

For most drivers, to have their licence reinstated after the cancellation period has ended is not automatic. They will probably have to complete a drink or drug driving education course and possibly be assessed for an alcohol or drug problem. Also, they will probably have to convince a court magistrate that they should be re-licensed.



supported by:



the law

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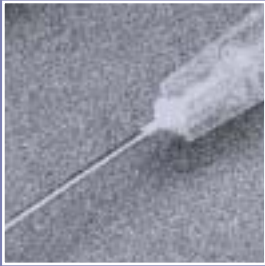
effects

tips

For confidential information, counselling and other assistance, call the  
Australian Drug Foundation (ADF) Safe Driving Line on freecall:

**1 800 023 000**

or [www.adf.org.au](http://www.adf.org.au)



(heroin)

## HEROIN & DRIVING FACT SHEET



Increasingly, driving accidents and driving fatalities involve drug use. This fact sheet aims to assist those people who may be at risk of drug impaired driving due to the use of heroin.



## HEROIN AND THE BODY

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Heroin comes from the sticky resin (opium) extracted from the seedpod of the opium poppy. When refined, the natural painkiller morphine is produced. Heroin is made from the chemical processing of morphine.

Heroin is a depressant drug. Depressant drugs slow down the activity of the brain and other parts of the central nervous system.

The effects of heroin vary with each person. This makes it difficult to predict exactly in what way, and for how long, heroin will affect a person's ability to drive safely. Effects are influenced by factors such as how much, how often and how it is used, plus the psychological and physical attributes of the person using it.

### COMMON EFFECTS EXPERIENCED AFTER USING HEROIN INCLUDE:

- :: feelings of intense pleasure and a strong sense of wellbeing
- :: diminished feelings of pain, hunger and sexual urges
- :: slower breathing and pulse rate and decrease in blood pressure; the pupils of the eyes also get much smaller and the mouth dries out
- :: the user may feel warm, heavy and sleepy
- :: nausea and vomiting can occur.

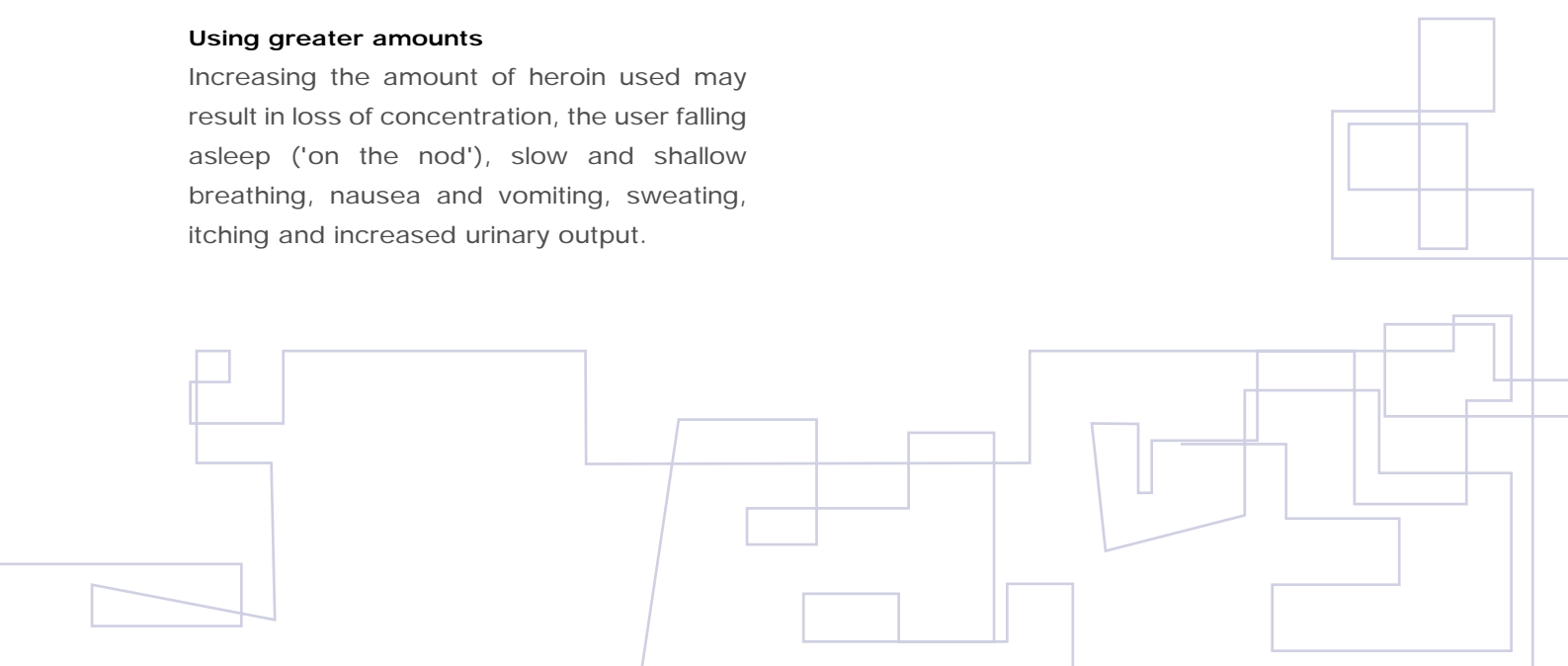
### Using greater amounts

Increasing the amount of heroin used may result in loss of concentration, the user falling asleep ('on the nod'), slow and shallow breathing, nausea and vomiting, sweating, itching and increased urinary output.

### OVERDOSE

With an overdose of heroin, breathing becomes very slow, body temperature drops, and heartbeat becomes irregular. Pinpoint pupils, blue lips and fingernails, cold skin, convulsions and snoring may also be present. Death may result.

Pure heroin is relatively non-toxic to the body. Street heroin is usually a mixture of pure heroin and substances such as caffeine and sugar. Some additives can be very poisonous. Not knowing the purity and, consequently, the amount of heroin used, makes it easy for users to accidentally overdose.



## HEROIN AND DRIVING

### DEPENDENCE AND WITHDRAWAL

Regular use of heroin can lead to dependence (addiction). If a person who is dependent on heroin suddenly stops using heroin or reduces the amount they use, they may experience withdrawal symptoms as they readjust to functioning without the drug.

Symptoms such as craving for the drug, restlessness, yawning, tears, diarrhoea, low blood pressure, stomach and leg cramps, vomiting, goose bumps, and a runny nose, usually peak around two to four days after heroin was last used. Other symptoms such as increased irritability, insomnia, loss of appetite, vomiting, elevated heart rate, muscle spasms and depression may develop. These symptoms subside after six to seven days from the last use. Some symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, insomnia, loss of appetite, periods of agitation and a continued craving for the drug, may last for months and even years.

Sudden withdrawal from heroin rarely causes death, unless the user is also using other drugs and is in poor health.

Driving safely requires attention to many things at once and the ability to react quickly when something unexpected happens. A driver requires:

- :: mental alertness
- :: clear vision
- :: physical coordination
- :: the ability to react appropriately.

Impairment of any of these driving abilities can increase the risk of having a crash.

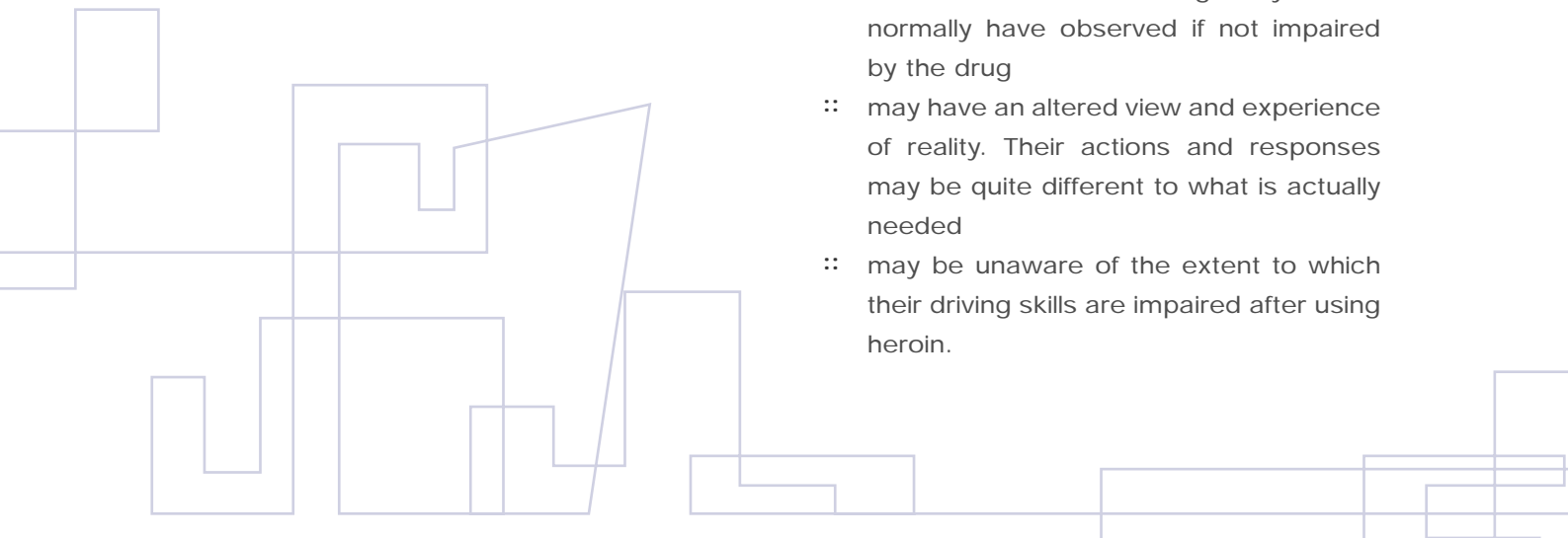
The dangers of driving after using heroin are due to:

- :: drowsiness, starting to 'nod'
- :: taking longer to respond to events or situations and possibly choosing an inappropriate response
- :: reduced ability to think clearly
- :: changes to sight, such as blurred vision
- :: nausea and vomiting.

As street heroin can vary in strength and purity, this further complicates predicting the extent to which a person's driving skills will be impaired after using heroin.

A person who uses heroin may think they can alter their driving to counteract any reductions in their driving ability due to the effects of heroin. However, this is dangerous as the effects of the drug may mean that the driver:

- :: fails to notice something they would normally have observed if not impaired by the drug
- :: may have an altered view and experience of reality. Their actions and responses may be quite different to what is actually needed
- :: may be unaware of the extent to which their driving skills are impaired after using heroin.



## EFFECTS ON DRIVING IF USING HEROIN WITH OTHER DRUGS

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It is difficult to predict the effects of combining drugs. Combining heroin with other depressant drugs, such as alcohol, can greatly increase the impairment to driver ability. Combining heroin with other stimulant drugs, such as amphetamines (or speed), may mask some of the effects of the drugs used, making it difficult for the user to judge how, and to what extent, their driving ability has been impaired.

### TIPS FOR SAFER TRAVEL

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Avoid driving if you use heroin, especially after recent use and if large quantities of heroin are used. Keep in mind that it is difficult to predict exactly how, and for how long, heroin will affect a person's ability to drive safely. The effects may last up to 24 hours. Withdrawal symptoms such as craving or 'hanging out', cramps and flu-like symptoms may be experienced only a few hours after last use.

Using both alcohol and heroin can considerably impair driver ability even when only a small amount of each is used. Combining heroin with any other drug, including alcohol, should be avoided.

Avoid driving if you are:

- :: dizzy or light headed
- :: unable to think clearly
- :: edgy
- :: nauseous or otherwise unwell
- :: drowsy or tired—sleep for several hours before driving after heroin. Also, drive at times other than late at night or early morning, when natural tiredness may increase the sedating effects of heroin.

If you use heroin and need to travel, plan ahead by:

- :: organising a driver who has not been using heroin, alcohol or other drugs
- :: arranging to be picked up
- :: using public transport or a taxi
- :: arranging to stay overnight.

