

From Rx to Heroin and Beyond

Nearly half of young people who inject heroin start by using Rx drugs.

Teen abuse of prescription (Rx) pain medicine, also known as opioids, usually starts in two ways. Some teens start abusing it with friends because they're curious, to self-medicate or because they think it will make them feel good. Others start taking it legitimately when prescribed by a doctor after an injury or dental procedure. But in some cases, legitimate use turns to dependence, abuse, addiction and then heroin use. Tragically, many overdose deaths are now being driven by heroin laced with fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, or similar compounds which are even more powerful and deadly.

Follow Katie's journey below and learn more about how Rx drug abuse can lead teens to heroin use.

1

Katie suffers an injury that requires surgery. Throughout the healing process, she is prescribed painkillers.

Prescription drugs are one of the most commonly abused drugs among 12-13 year olds.



2

After a few months of taking the painkillers, Katie notices that they don't work as well or last as long. She begins taking more pills than prescribed.

1 In 10 teens report having abused or misused an Rx drug at least once in their lifetime.



3

Katie quickly runs out of her Rx – and feels like she needs it. She begins stealing pills from a friend's medicine cabinet. She learns that crushing and snorting the pills can help her feel better, faster.

More than half of teens of teens who abuse Rx pain relievers say that they got them from family or friends.



6

Katie's tolerance is very high and she cannot afford the amount she needs to keep away the powerful cravings. Jacob says she can use less heroin if she injects it. She is afraid of needles, but Jacob offers to inject the heroin for her. She agrees. Neither of them know that the heroin he bought contains fentanyl, which is much more powerful than heroin. After a few hours, Katie is breathing very slowly and is turning blue. Jacob calls 911 and leaves her.

Nearly 1/2 of young people who inject heroin start by abusing Rx drugs.



5

Katie asks her doctor for more painkillers, but he refuses. She can't find enough pills and begins to suffer from withdrawal. Her friend Jacob says he has heroin (also an opioid), but no painkillers. Katie never thought she would use heroin, but feels desperate to stop the horrible withdrawal symptoms. She starts snorting heroin.

4 out of 5 heroin users began first with recreational use of Rx pain relievers.



4

Katie's parents notice that she is behaving strangely – and that she has a new set of friends. When they find a baggie of loose pills in her room, they become concerned and confront her. Katie denies that she has a problem.

95% of parents believe their child has never taken a prescription drug for a reason other than its intended use.



7

The paramedics find Katie and administer Naloxone, which reverses the effects of the heroin overdose. They need to give her more Naloxone though because fentanyl is so potent. Katie is watched closely at the hospital.

Naloxone (Narcan) is a drug that can reverse an opioid overdose and save lives.



8

Soon after, her parents enroll her in an adolescent recovery program, which in this case, includes medication-assisted treatment, counseling and support. Post-treatment, Katie's family is committed to continuing her care to keep her healthy.

Medication-assisted treatment is the use of medication, therapy and support to address withdrawal, cravings and relapse prevention.

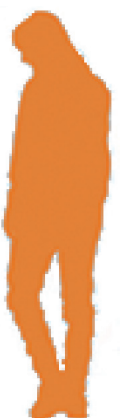


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Katie is in recovery and working hard to stay healthy.

Most people who get into and remain in treatment stop using drugs.

With ongoing recovery support, it is possible to lead a healthy, productive life after addiction.



Find help and resources at drugfree.org or call the Partnership toll-free helpline at 1-855-DRUGFREE 1-855-378-4373).

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