



## Fentanyl

Opioid-related overdose deaths continue to take a terrible toll on families, communities, and the workplace. More than 175 people in America die from drug overdoses every day. Almost half (46%) of these opioid-related deaths are from the use of fentanyl. Fentanyl now contributes to more deaths than prescription opioids or heroin.

### What Is Fentanyl Used For?

Fentanyl is a powerful painkiller that is often used to treat intense chronic pain, or to manage severe pain after surgery. It is a powerful synthetic opioid similar to morphine, but 50 to 100 times more potent. It's a Schedule II prescription drug often used to treat the pain of terminally ill cancer patients.

Fentanyl can be used safely under a doctor's care, but many people abuse it for the euphoric effects it can produce when taken in high doses. There is a serious problem of abuse, addiction, and deadly overdose with fentanyl.

Fentanyl is 100 times stronger than morphine and heroin, and there are strict guidelines for prescribing it. Legal fentanyl is extremely dangerous when abused, but illegal and uncontrolled "street" fentanyl is even more deadly.

### What Does Fentanyl Look Like?

Fentanyl is produced in many forms. It can be a powder, a tablet, a pill, in skin patches, and on blotter paper like LSD. Fentanyl can be swallowed, injected, or snorted. People put blotter paper soaked in fentanyl in their mouth and even in their eye to be absorbed. It is often mixed with other prescription drugs and street drugs like cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamine. There is no way to know if an illicit drug has been mixed with fentanyl, and law enforcement personnel believe that fentanyl mixed with other drugs is the number one reason for increased overdose deaths during the past decade.

Fentanyl is colorless, tasteless, and odorless—which means it is impossible to know if it has been mixed with another drug. It has many street names, including: apache, china white, jackpot, murder 8, and TNT. It is more powerful and more addictive than heroin.

### Why Is Fentanyl So Addictive?

All opioid-based drugs like fentanyl activate the "reward-center" of the brain. This part of the brain usually works to reinforce pleasurable positive behaviors, but fentanyl "hijacks" this part of the brain—causing a "high" that makes users want to keep using the drug again and again.

Over time, the brain adapts to fentanyl (just as it does to other drugs), making it necessary for the user to take more and more of the drug to get the same high. Eventually, the body begins to need the drug just to function. At this point, if the user stops taking the drug, he or she will experience often painful physical withdrawal symptoms.

### If Fentanyl Is So Dangerous and Addictive, Why Do People Use and Abuse It?

Fentanyl binds to opioid receptors in the brain. These receptors flood the brain with dopamine, creating an extreme sense of relaxation and euphoria. The brain adapts to the drug and progresses from tolerance, to dependence, to addiction.

Short-term effects of fentanyl are relaxation, extreme pleasure, euphoria, and drowsiness, but can also include confusion, nausea, constipation, respiratory depression, coma, unconsciousness, and death.

In addition to managing pain, the opioid receptors that fentanyl binds to also control breathing. Fentanyl can cause opioid receptors to fail at doing the important job of managing respiration, resulting in the user's breathing slowing down and then stopping altogether.

### Signs of Fentanyl Overdose

If loved ones, friends, or coworkers overdose on fentanyl, their life will depend on getting emergency medical attention. These are some signs of a possible overdose: pinpoint pupils, extreme drowsiness or unconsciousness, respiratory depression, blue lips or fingertips, or choking or gurgling sounds.

If you suspect an overdose, call 911 immediately. Keep the person awake and roll the individual on his or her side to prevent choking.

If someone you know is using fentanyl, encourage that person to seek professional help. For information and referrals, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Treatment Referral Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP.

***The following information is provided by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities.***

### The Connection Between Stress and Suicide Risk

The average American today is more likely to report being under extreme stress than they did in the 2007 American Psychological Association (APA) survey, the Stress in America™, which examined how stress affects the health and well-being of adults living in the United States.

Stress has long been thought to be a significant contributor to suicide ideation. A stressful life event—such as the death of a spouse/loved one, job loss, financial challenges, etc.—may trigger suicide thoughts, leading to self-harming or suicidal behaviors. However, such events are more likely to act as triggers in already high-risk and vulnerable people. While subjective, very high levels of perceived stress have been observed in people with early signs of suicidal thoughts.

In 2015, the reported overall stress levels increased slightly, with greater percentages of adults reporting extreme levels of stress than in 2014, according to the APA survey. Overall, adults report that stress has a negative impact on their mental and physical health, and a proportion do not feel that they are doing enough to manage their stress.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the best ways to manage stress in hard times are through self-care. A few examples include:

- Avoid drugs and alcohol. They may seem to be a temporary fix to feel better, but in the long run drugs and alcohol can create more problems and add to your stress.
- Find support. Seek help from someone with a sympathetic, listening ear. Sharing about your problems and stress really can lighten the burden.
- Connect socially. Make sure that you are spending time with loved ones. Consider planning fun activities with your partner, children, or friends.

If you or someone you care about are experiencing negative effects of stress: Do not ignore the signs. Get help. If you are in crisis, contact the Georgia Crisis and Access Line at 800-715-4225.

To learn more about suicide prevention, visit the DBHDD website at:  
<https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention>.

Or contact Suicide Prevention Director, Walker Tisdale, at:  
[walker.tisdale@dbhdd.ga.gov](mailto:walker.tisdale@dbhdd.ga.gov).

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:**  
1-800-273-TALK (8255).