

## **Downers**

Barbiturates are powerful depressant drugs that slow down the central nervous system. Barbiturates are legitimately prescribed by doctors to treat epilepsy, sleeping disorders, anxiety and tension under such trade names as Seconal, Amytal, Tuina and Nembutal. On the street they are often named for the colours of their capsules.

No one should operate a motor vehicle or engage in any tasks requiring heavy concentration or coordination while under the influence of any CNS depressant.

*Common Names:* downers, barbs, blue heaven (Amytal), red devils, yellow jackets (Nembutal), rainbows.

*Appearance & Use:* Generally pills

## **Immediate Effects**

*Immediate Effects:* Short-term effects appear rapidly after a single dose and disappear usually within a few hours or even days. A small amount will characteristically produce calm and relaxation, inducing slowed breathing and reflexes.

A larger dose may produce effects similar to that of drunkenness, including slurred speech, staggering, slowed reactions, loss of inhibition, and intense emotions often expressed in an extreme and unpredictable manner.

A high dose usually will produce slow, shallow and irregular breathing, and can result in death from respiratory arrest.

## **Long Term Effects**

*Long Term Effects:* Symptoms include impairment of memory and judgment, depression, mood swings, hostility, chronic fatigue and paranoia.

*Tolerance and Dependence:* The body quickly becomes tolerant to the effects of barbiturates meaning that larger doses are required to achieve the same “high”. However, the body does not become tolerant to the effect the drug has on breathing, meaning the higher the doses, the weaker the breathing, eventually leading to coma, and even death.

Symptoms of dependence include progressive restlessness, anxiety, irritability, insomnia, delirium and convulsions in severe cases. Further, when chronic and regular high-dose abuse has resulted in serious physical dependence, abrupt withdrawal can cause symptoms severe enough to result in death.

# Drug Health Matters

## **Barbiturates and the Law**

Barbiturates are controlled drugs under Canada's Food and Drugs Act and are legally available only by prescription from a doctor. As such, possessing barbiturates or other controlled drugs does not constitute an offence. However, anyone convicted of trafficking in these drugs or possessing them for the purposes of trafficking, is guilty of an offence that carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment.

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