

LIFELINE PUBLICATIONS PRESENT

McDERMOTT'S GUIDE TO ...

BROWN

FOR

BEGINNERS



WHAT'S IT LIKE
TO BE A HEROIN USER?

McDERMOTT'S GUIDE TO

BROWN

FOR BEGINNERS



Outside the school playground, a sleazy character in a white coat scans the street for plod. The coast is clear as some junior schoolchildren approach the window of the ice cream van.

"PSST. HEY KID?
WANNA TRY SOME
HEROIN?

I'M GIVING OUT
FREE SAMPLES TO
PROSPECTIVE
CUSTOMERS."

It's bollocks, of course. Real drug dealers don't want to recruit children as customers. Their pocket money won't cover the costs, their parents tend to keep a close watch on what they do, and when they do get caught, they can't keep their mouths shut.

In fact, your introduction to heroin will almost certainly come from someone that you regard as a good friend. Perhaps there's a pot draught on and you can't get your usual smoke? Or maybe you've been doing an E or two, and someone tells you about this rather mellow way of dealing with the comedown. And it isn't like you have to inject it or anything. It's only a little toot. Not that different from smoking a weed, really.

And as you know only too well, everything they tell you about drugs is a lie. The government, the media, the schools -- none of them tell the truth. And not only do they lie, but they're hypocritical as well. Sending people to jail for harmless drugs like pot while the tobacco and alcohol industry gets fat selling cigarettes and alcopops to kids. So if they're lying to us about those drugs, well, it stands to reason that they'll lie about heroin as well, doesn't it?

Maybe. Maybe not. There are a lot of myths about drugs and drug users, but at least as many come from drug users themselves as come from the government. After all, when did you last look at the research? That's the only way to get a really accurate picture, and even then you need to have the experience to interpret it accurately.

So why should you believe this? Good question. Well, I've used it myself for the last twenty years or so, and I'm not in the business of just say no. But I can give you some idea of what sort of lifestyle you can look forward to should you be thinking of marrying into the Brown family. You've got questions? I've got answers.

YOU CAN TRUST ME,
KID. I WOULDN'T
SHIT YOU.
HONEST.

"WHAT'S IT LIKE THEN, HEROIN. IS IT TRUE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT IT BEING BETTER THAN A **THOUSAND ORGASMS?**"

It's a funny drug, heroin. People have all these expectations, and when they first try it, it's usually something of a big let down.

There's no big overpowering thing, usually it just makes you feel a little sleepy and a little itchy and it makes you want to puke a lot. Most people tend not to like it the first time they do it. But for some reason, they feel the need to go back and do it again. And again. And then after a while, it starts to make you feel pretty comfortable. All your worries and anxieties go away for a while. But the problem is, by the time you're that far in, you're already headed for trouble.



You've developed a taste for it. And the you don't get the full effect of the drug until you're actually addicted.

True heroin euphoria is at least as much about the relief of pain as about any positive drug experience. Physical pain. Emotional pain. Withdrawal pain.

If you're embarking on a heroin habit, you should get used to the idea that you're going to experience all of these in no small measure.



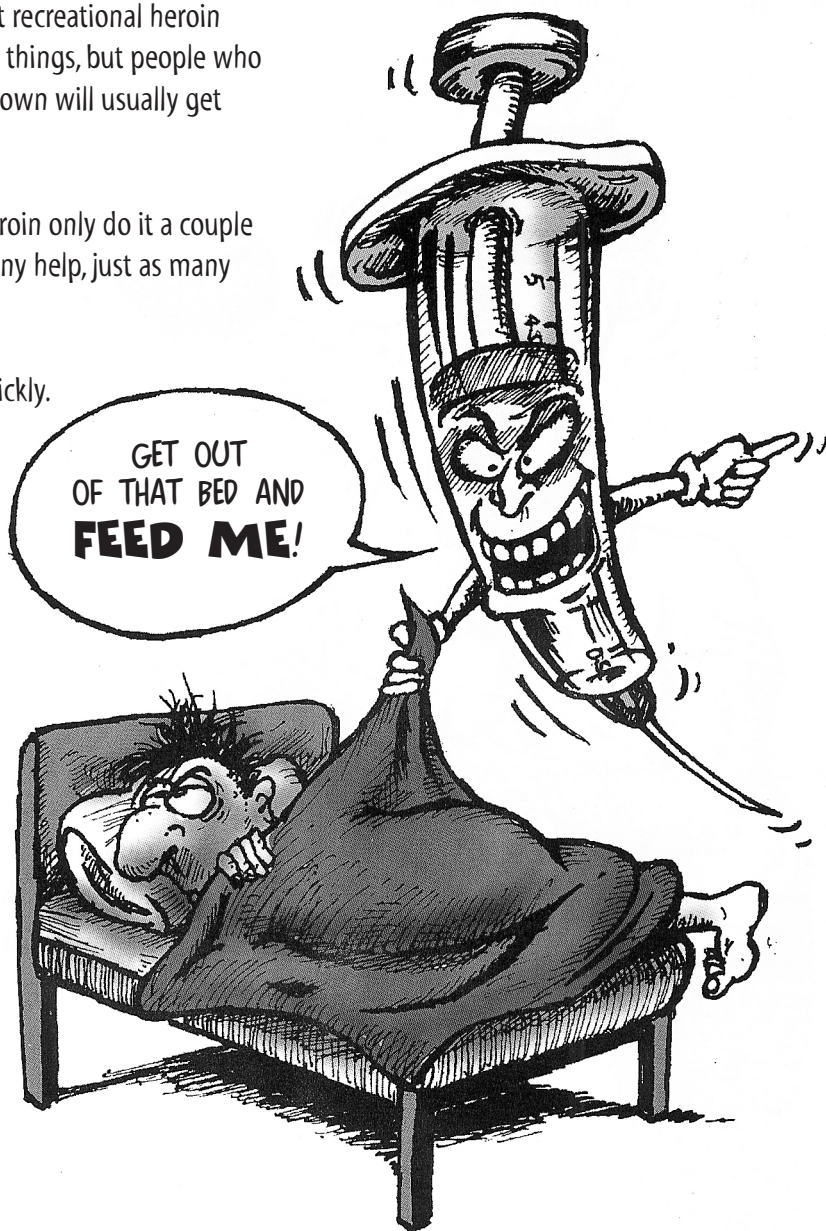
"IT'S ALL CRAP ABOUT HEROIN BEING SO **ADDICTIVE**. I KNOW LOADS OF PEOPLE WHO JUST USE AT WEEKENDS WITHOUT ANY PROBLEM AT ALL."

It's true that recreational use of heroin is possible. So is climbing Mount Everest, but that doesn't mean that everyone can do it. Recognizing that recreational heroin use is possible, and believing that recreational heroin use is wise are two very different things, but people who have started dabbling with Dr. Brown will usually get them confused.

Though many people who try heroin only do it a couple of times and then stop without any help, just as many people get into trouble.

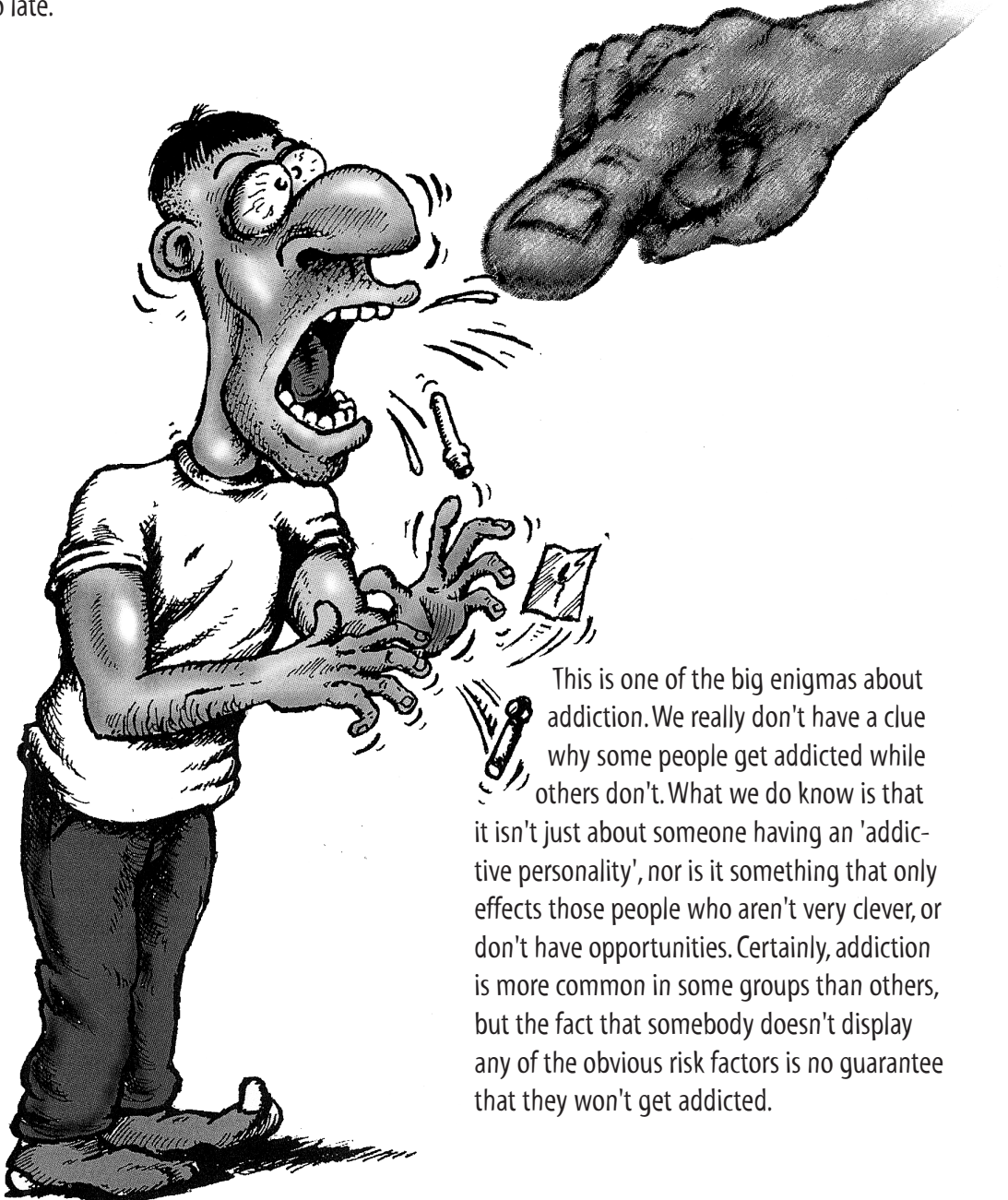
And it doesn't always happen quickly. People can dabble successfully for four or five years, believing that they are in control. And then slowly, subtly, you wake up one morning and find out

YOU AREN'T IN CONTROL ANY LONGER.



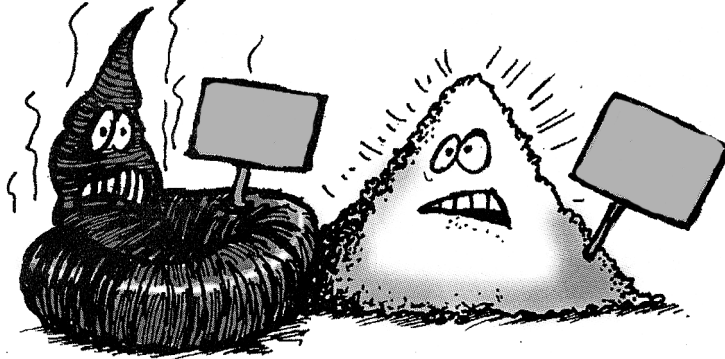
"SO WHY SHOULDN'T I DO IT THEN? I JUST WANT TO SEE WHAT IT'S LIKE AND THEN I'LL JACK IT IN."

But, how do you know whether you are part of the group that just tries it a few times because all their friends are doing it, or part of the other group that starts doing it and finds that they don't have any desire to stop? There's no real way of knowing which type you'll be until it's too late.



This is one of the big enigmas about addiction. We really don't have a clue why some people get addicted while others don't. What we do know is that it isn't just about someone having an 'addictive personality', nor is it something that only effects those people who aren't very clever, or don't have opportunities. Certainly, addiction is more common in some groups than others, but the fact that somebody doesn't display any of the obvious risk factors is no guarantee that they won't get addicted.

"BUT HEROIN IS A RELATIVELY **SAFE** DRUG COMPARED WITH MOST. IT ISN'T THE HEROIN THAT DOES THE DAMAGE, IT'S THE **SHIT** THAT THEY CUT IT WITH."

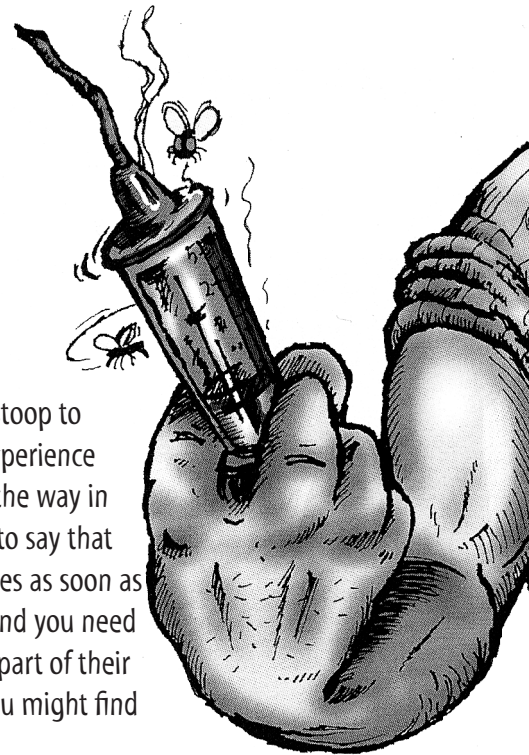


That's another of those famous myths that we've been discussing. Heroin is a relatively safe drug in the sense that it doesn't do any organic damage. However, this is not the same thing as saying that heroin addiction is a relatively safe lifestyle, because it isn't. It's extremely risky for a variety of reasons.

FIRSTLY, WHILE YOU MIGHT NOT BE INJECTING NOW, IF YOU CONTINUE TO USE AND YOU DO END UP WITH A HABIT, IT'S MUCH MORE LIKELY THAN NOT THAT YOU'LL END UP

INJECTING

Of course, at the moment, you're convinced that you'd never stoop to doing such a thing, but again, that's because you've got no experience of addiction. One of the interesting things about addiction is the way in which it tends to loosen your moral boundaries. Which is not to say that every heroin user will turn around and start mugging old ladies as soon as they get a habit. However, you might start shoplifting if you find you need the money. The vast majority of heroin addicts support some part of their habit by shoplifting. Or if your self-esteem isn't that high, you might find that you turn to prostitution.



Of course, these changes doesn't happen overnight, but by a process of gradually eroding your old boundaries and reestablishing the addict's boundaries in their place. You might start by copping off with somebody who happens to be doing a bit of dealing, but it's ok, it's just a relationship and the drugs have nothing to do with it. Then after a while, you find yourself going with more and more guys just because they've got enough brown to make sure you both have a good time.

Finally, one day you find yourself sick and as you're walking around, trying to borrow the money to score, you get propositioned. One quick wank and you'll be well again. So you tell yourself that it's just this once, and you won't do it again. Until the next time you find yourself sick as a dog with no chance of borrowing the cash from anywhere.

And if you're gonna do one punter to get straight, why not do two and get high? After all, what's the point in putting up with all this shit simply to get straight? And if he only wants to do it without a condom, are you really gonna wait for maybe an hour or two, until you find someone else who is happy to do it with protection? It isn't long before you need more and more heroin to detach yourself from the life that you've found yourself in.



YOU'LL NEVER REALLY KNOW UNTIL YOU FIND OUT.

For someone who is in the process of becoming addicted, this slippery slope happens in all sorts of areas. You swear that you're only going to try it once, just to see what it's like. There's no way that you would ever use it often enough to get addicted, and there's no way you would start injecting because you're scared of needles.

Almost every heroin addict I ever met, and I've known an awful lot, says pretty much the same thing when they first start using.

"I JUST WANT TO TRY IT ONCE. SEE WHAT IT'S LIKE."

The thing about addiction is that nobody ever makes the decision to become an addict, it just sort of sneaks up on you. And so you decide you'll just use at the weekend, but it isn't long before you've decided that that means you can start using on Friday night and keep on using continually until Monday morning.

Been there, done that.

And by the time you have, you'll be fucked too.

Nobody says "Wow, man. Using those long needles to inject in my groin is so cool. I really wanna do that for a hobby." You start out smoking, but then all of a sudden, you can only afford one twenty pound parcel between four of you, and that isn't going to get any of you sorted. So why not shoot it up, just this once? Instead of the four of us just about feeling it, we'll all get really stoned.

JUST THIS ONCE.

Famous last words.

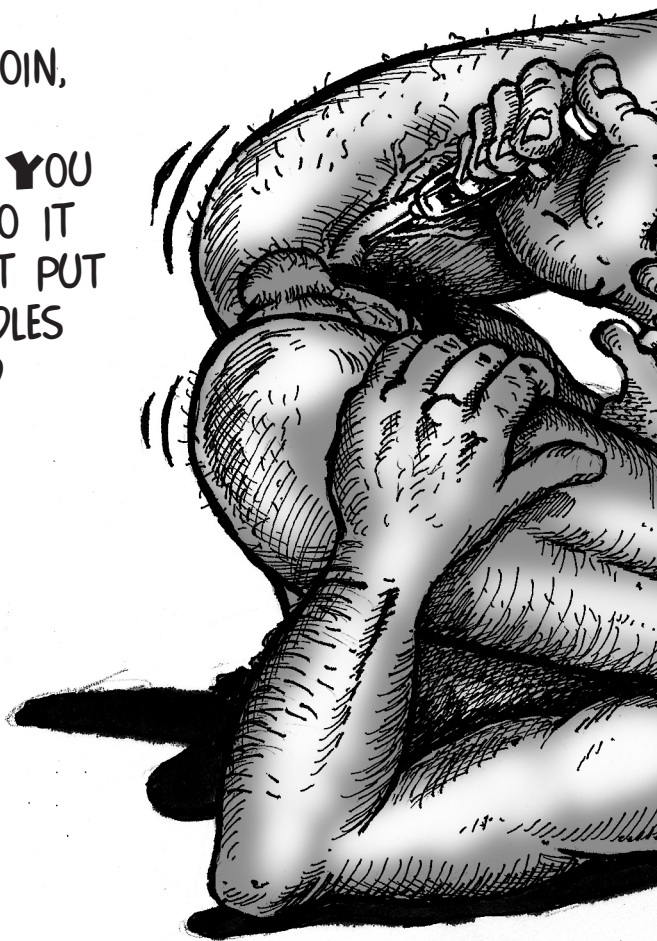


It isn't long before you're shooting up every time, because it makes so much more sense. A few people manage to stick to smoking for quite a while, but the average length of time that people are addicted for is thirteen years. And there aren't many who are still smoking four or five years down the road.

So eventually, the veins in your arms collapse from overuse. So why not use the back of your hands? You've lost any fear of needles by now. In fact, you can only think about one thing -- how to get that damn thing into a vein. And soon, any fucking vein will do. Can't find one in the back of your hands? So how about your fingers? Or the palms of your hands? So what if they are only small veins, and they usually burst when you get a needle into it, and blow your shot? Shit, you don't want that.

BUT THAT VEIN IN YOUR GROIN, THAT'S A REAL BIG ONE, MAN. THICKER THAN YOUR THUMB. YOU CAN'T MISS IT. YOU COULD DO IT WITH YOUR EYES SHUT. JUST PUT ONE OF THOSE REAL LONG NEEDLES ON, AND GO IN STRAIGHT AND DEEP. REALLY,

YOU CAN'T MISS.



YEAH, BUT THAT'S FOR
DUMMIES. I **USE**
DRUGS. I DON'T LET THE
DRUGS **USE ME**.

I've just got two words for you.

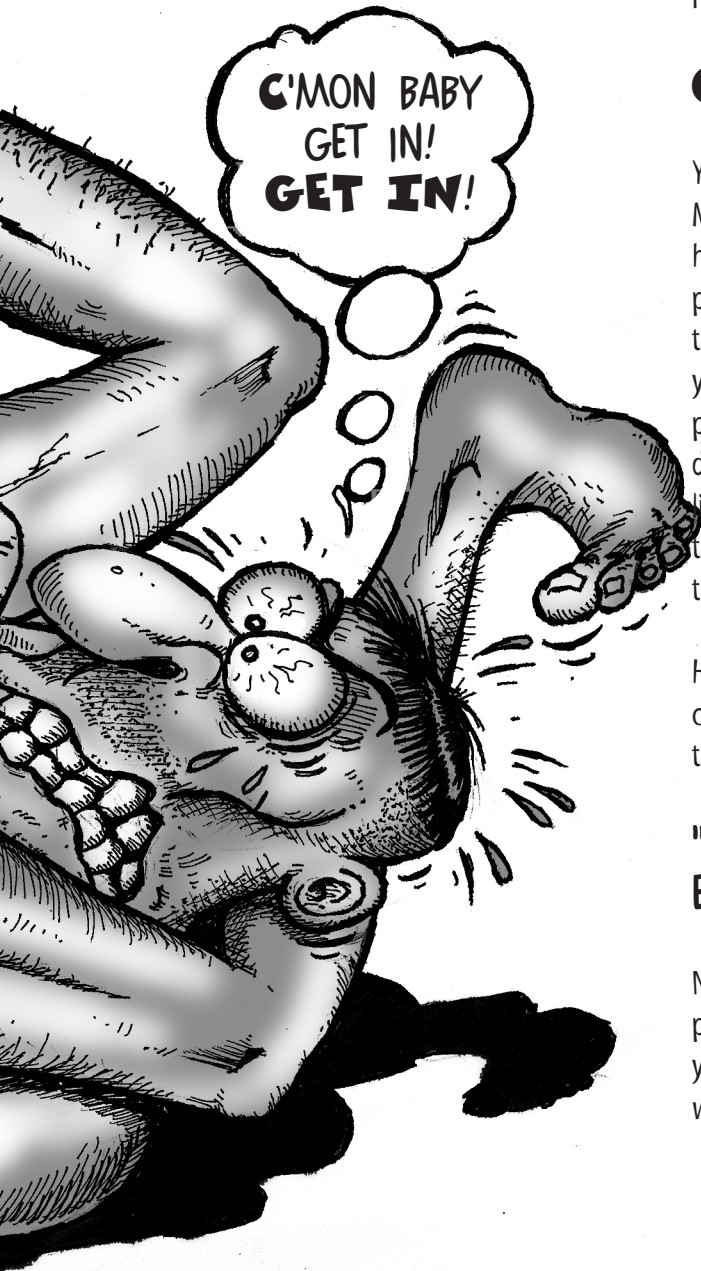
CLIVE FROGGATT.

You know, the doctor who was an advisor to Margaret Thatcher? He was a smart guy. He had everything going for him. Money, status, power, intelligence. This was a man who had the strength of will to push himself through years of study for medical school and the punishing schedule of a junior doctor, and as a doctor he understood what the outcome was likely to be if he kept on using. Do you really think you're smarter or have more willpower than he did?

Here's a clue. Intelligence and willpower don't come into it. If you use the drug often enough, the chances are you will get addicted.

**"SO HOW OFTEN IS OFTEN
ENOUGH?"**

Nobody knows. Different times for different people. For some people it can take a few years. Others are lost from the first dose. You won't know until it's too late.

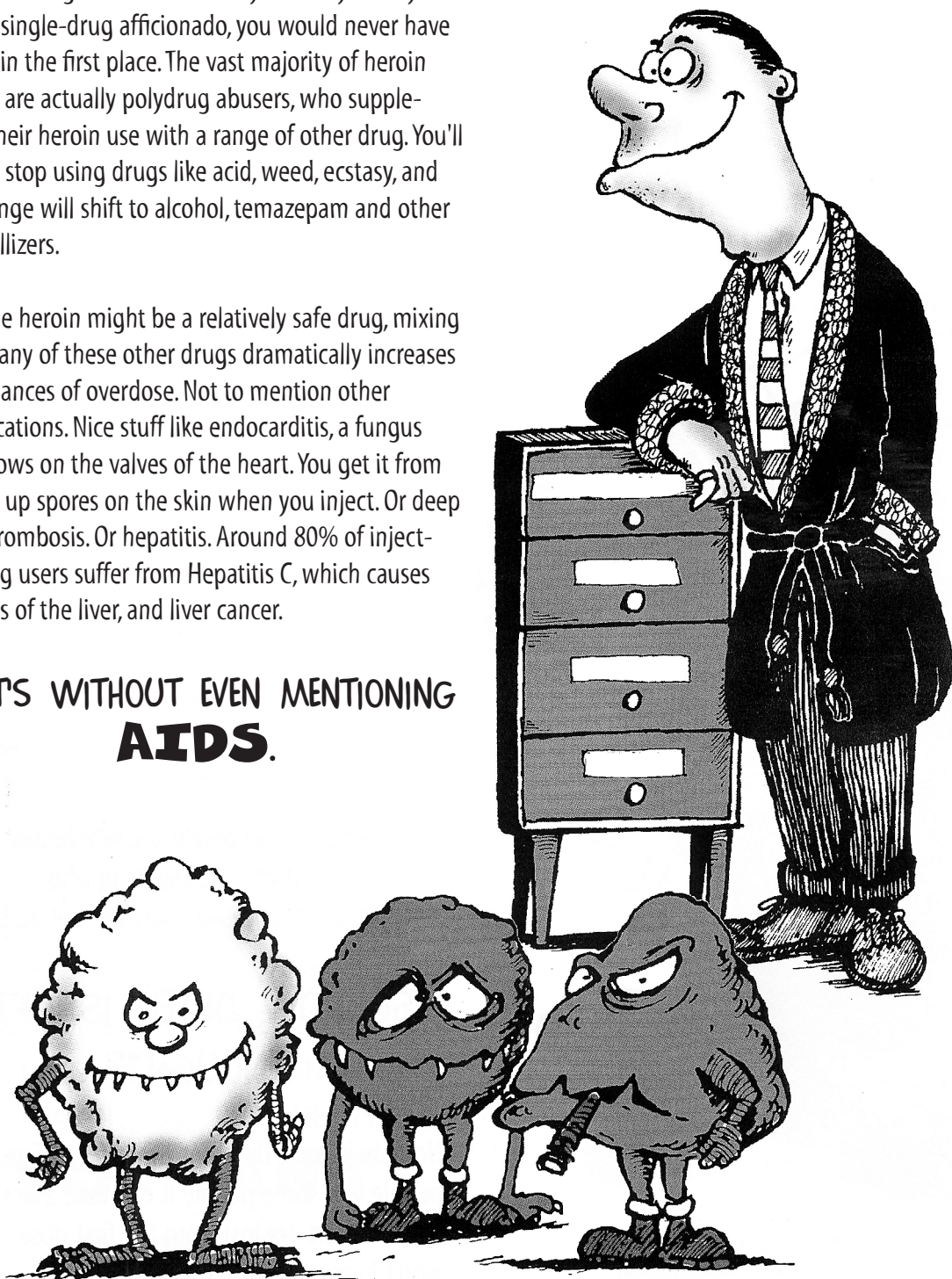


"SO WHAT ARE THE OTHER HAZARDS"

Of course, there's a very strong chance that you won't limit your drug use to heroin. Why should you? If you'd been a single-drug aficionado, you would never have tried it in the first place. The vast majority of heroin addicts are actually polydrug abusers, who supplement their heroin use with a range of other drug. You'll tend to stop using drugs like acid, weed, ecstasy, and your range will shift to alcohol, temazepam and other tranquillizers.

So while heroin might be a relatively safe drug, mixing it with any of these other drugs dramatically increases your chances of overdose. Not to mention other complications. Nice stuff like endocarditis, a fungus that grows on the valves of the heart. You get it from picking up spores on the skin when you inject. Or deep vein thrombosis. Or hepatitis. Around 80% of injecting drug users suffer from Hepatitis C, which causes cirrhosis of the liver, and liver cancer.

THAT'S WITHOUT EVEN MENTIONING
AIDS.



"I KNOW IT WON'T HAPPEN TO ME THOUGH. I'VE HAD NO TROUBLE STICKING TO USING ONCE A WEEK FOR NEARLY A YEAR NOW."

Congratulations. But I managed to do that for five years before I got what I now consider a real habit. The fact that you've managed to control your use in the past is no guarantee at all that you'll be able to do it in the future. In fact, the opposite is much more likely to be the case. The more often you use it, the more likely you are to get into trouble eventually. That's how the pharmacology of addictive drugs works. Every hit reinforces your belief that doing heroin feels good. Over time, using heroin effectively reprogrammes your brain, and so considerations of caution and other ambitions and desires become less important to you than the desire to continue doing heroin. This process is a large part of what addiction is all about.

"SO IF IT'S SO TERRIBLE, WHY THE HELL DO PEOPLE KEEP DOING IT?"

Swings and roundabouts. There's a big price to pay, but although it might look that way from the outside, heroin addicts aren't completely irrational. They still get something from the drug. The fun and the excitement gets old pretty fast, but it becomes extremely comfortable. It's a lot easier to face the world with junk inside you than it is without. Lots of addicts suffer from depression, or tend to be oversensitive or are unhappy about something. Even if you weren't when you started using, means that most addicts end up trying to block out some sort of pain.



BUT I THOUGHT IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE EASY TO QUIT? MY DOCTOR TOLD ME IT'S NO WORSE THAN A DOSE OF **FLU**?

Then your doctor's never done a turkey himself. Sure, the pain is somewhat similar to a dose of flu. Runny nose. Aching muscles. The shits. But the thing is, with the flu, you sleep most of the time so you get some respite. With a heroin withdrawal, that pain is there, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. And forget this three or four day stuff as well. Maybe the first few times, when you don't really have a habit. But anyone whose been using for any significant length of time should count on it being at least a month before they feel anywhere close to right again.

And that's not the worst of it either. Getting off is the easy part. Staying off is the real difficult thing. That's a lifetime struggle, and for some people it never goes away.

For some people, the shit that goes with a habit just becomes too great to bear and that's when they get clean. They call it 'hitting bottom'. And other people just keep on doing it, year after year after year.



**OK, BUT I THOUGHT LIFELINE WAS A HARM
REDUCTION AGENCY. SHOULDN'T YOU BE TELLING
US THE BEST WAY TO AVOID GETTING ADDICTED?**

There is only one sure way to avoid getting a smack habit. Don't do heroin. Plain and simple. If you've just started using, stop while you still have the chance. If you're already further down the road than that, well, what are you reading this for? You already know all this stuff by now anyway.