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How Is Fentanyl Addiction Treated

Louisville Addiction Treatment Center - November 6, 2021

Fentanyl addiction can be very hard to overcome, but someone with a strong will and proper treatment can make it. Professional help is highly recommended for anyone who is trying to break their dependence on this drug.

What is Fentanyl?

Fentanyl is an opioid pain medication that's estimated to be between 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Most of the information in this article is based upon fentanyl abuse, not prescribed use.

What Does Fentanyl Do?

When used as prescribed by a doctor or dentist, fentanyl can be helpful during surgery or other medical procedures because it has powerful effects on the body. However, when abused, the drug acts as a fast-acting and potentially deadly synthetic opioid.

How Does One Become Addicted to Fentanyl?

Fentanyl addiction often begins when someone becomes dependent on this drug after being prescribed it for pain relief due to some kind of accident or disease. There have even been cases where teenagers have become addicted after receiving a prescription from a doctor following wisdom teeth removal surgery. In another scenario, young adults have developed addictions after becoming hooked while trying to self-medicate their depression.

Can Fentanyl Addiction Cause Death?

Yes. As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states, fentanyl is an opioid that can cause severe respiratory depression, making it extremely dangerous. Someone who overdoses on this drug will fall asleep and won't wake up unless they receive immediate medical attention.

Overdosing on opioids like fentanyl can lead to death within minutes if intervention is not administered right away. Even when taken according to a doctor's instructions, an overdose of this medication still has the potential to cause death. That's why it's very important for anyone who is prescribed a fentanyl patch to wear one and only take the number of pills that have been prescribed.

What Are the Signs of Fentanyl Abuse?

Everyone's experience is unique when it comes to opioid addiction, but some common symptoms may indicate a problem. The most obvious is intense cravings for fentanyl or other opioids, making it difficult to stop using even though the user knows there are negative consequences.

Other signs include experiencing withdrawal symptoms after not taking fentanyl for just a few hours, stealing or engaging in illicit behaviors to obtain the drug, missing work or school because of substance use, and failing to keep up with responsibilities at home to a drug problem.

People who take fentanyl may not know they are taking the drug until it is too late. This is because fentanyl can be taken as a pill, which looks just like prescription painkillers such as OxyContin or Percocet, or it can be ingested, snorted, or even injected after being turned into a powder first.

Around 100 times more intoxicating than morphine, fentanyl can quickly cause someone to stop breathing and possibly slip into a coma. Therefore, if there is any suspicion that someone has overdosed on this drug, medical attention should be obtained immediately.

Symptoms of Fentanyl addiction include:

- Constricted pupils
- Sedation
- Drowsiness
- Respiratory depression or arrest
- Cardiovascular collapse (circulatory failure)

How Is Fentanyl Addiction Treated?

There are many different ways to treat fentanyl addiction, including medically assisted detox, outpatient treatment, inpatient rehab, and counseling.

Treatment for fentanyl addiction usually begins with the detoxification process. Once the physical symptoms of opioid withdrawal are manageable, patients can begin participating in individual or group therapy.

This type of therapy might explore why the patient began abusing opioids, to begin with, and it could also work to keep them from returning to drug use in the future.

Family counseling is often helpful for loved ones who have been affected by a family member's addiction. Aftercare programs might include ongoing treatment sessions, support groups, and follow-up assistance.

What Is Fentanyl Detox Like?

Withdrawal symptoms from fentanyl can range from mild to severe, depending on how long someone abused the drug before stopping suddenly.

For example, someone who has been abusing this medication for just a few days will likely experience symptoms such as insomnia, watery eyes and runny nose, muscle pain, and diarrhea.

Meanwhile, someone who has been using this drug for longer or taking higher doses will likely also experience symptoms like abdominal cramps, tremors, and seizures.

Additionally, if someone abuses other drugs in addition to fentanyl, there may be additional symptoms during withdrawal, those due to interactions between the drugs.

What Is the Long-Term Outlook for Someone With Fentanyl Addiction?

People who engage in medication-assisted detox and then go through treatment will greatly increase their chances of long-term abstinence.

For example, according to NIDA, about half of individuals who received any medication for opioid addiction during rehab remained drug-free six months after leaving treatment.

Meanwhile, 90 percent of people who complete a month-long medically assisted treatment plan will likely remain substance-free one year later or even more.

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