

fast facts

VICODIN

■ **Overview:** Eminem got strung out on it; Courtney Love did, too. And rumor has it that you'd have to include Melanie Griffith and Foxy Brown on the A-list of stars who've had problems with it. Meet Vicodin[®], a drug that blends a synthetic narcotic, *hydrocodone bitartrate*, with acetaminophen in a single package that's more potent (and potentially *way* more dangerous) than either taken separately. A main reason why: Vicodin can hook a user in as few as seven days.



■ **Appearance:** Most common: white, scored, oblong tablets, imprinted with "Vicodin," "Vicodin ES," or "Vicodin HP," depending on dose. Other forms include capsules and a liquid sold under such trade names as Hycodan[®], Lorcet[®], Lortab[®], Tussionex[®], and Tylox[®].

■ **Street Names:** Vike and Watson-387, the imprint on the generic pill.

■ **Actions/Effects:** Chemically similar to heroin, Vicodin travels the same neurological pathways to block the perception of pain. Vicodin also increases the activity of a key neurotransmitter, *dopamine*, triggering such an intense euphoria that users keep coming back for more—and still more, after that.



■ **Medical Uses:** Vicodin is prescribed to treat moderate to severe pain, usually associated with cancer, surgery, or serious injury.

■ **Risks/Side Effects:** Vicodin can cause dizziness and induce sleep, while impairing motor skills. Other common side effects include dry mouth, nausea, constipation, and increased perspiration. Overdoses involving Vicodin can be life-threatening, especially if used with alcohol or other depressant drugs. Overdose symptoms include constricted pupils, confusion, slowed breathing, and unconsciousness. Long-term use of acetaminophen is also linked to an increased risk of liver damage or failure.



■ **Addiction Potential:** The risk of both physical and psychological dependence on Vicodin is high. Users may experience withdrawal symptoms after as few as 5-7 days of continuous use. Withdrawal symptoms include chills, irritability, severe anxiety, headaches, and insomnia.

■ **Trends:** Vicodin use has soared in recent years, partly fueled by the fame of its star user base. In 2009, the number of high school seniors reporting use during the previous year stood at 9.7 percent.

■ **Demographics:** Vicodin and other prescription narcotics constitute the most-abused group of prescription drugs, according to the National Household Survey, released in 2009. Of the 15.1 million Americans who reported misusing prescription drugs in the previous year, more than 78 percent misused prescription pain relievers.



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