

MEDICINE

Two New Drug Hazards

Warning is given that methadon, potent synthetic substitute for morphine, is habit-forming and chewing paper strips inside benzedrine inhalers may cause poisoning.

► METHADON, potent new synthetic substitute for morphine which has just come on the market, can cause addiction, or drug habit, just as morphine itself can.

And if you chew or swallow the paper strips inside benzedrine inhalers, you can get poisoned, hear voices, get crazy ideas, and may even die.

Warnings on these two new drug hazards, appearing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Dec. 6), were given by two groups of doctors.

Two Groups Give Warning

The one on methadon is from a group of U. S. Public Health Service doctors. That on benzedrine is from two psychiatrists formerly on the staff of the Branch U. S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Benjamin Harrison.

Methadon was first synthesized in Germany and called 10820. It is also known as amidon and dolophine. Its success in relieving pain in cancer patients and in suppressing withdrawal symptoms in morphine addicts when they were taken off morphine is reported by Drs. Harris Isbell, Abraham Walker, Nathan B. Eddy, John L. Wilson and Clifford F. Moran of the U. S. Public Health Service.

But persons getting the drug develop tolerance to its pain-relieving and sedative, or quieting effects so that larger doses are needed after a short time. The tolerance to the pain-relieving effect develops quickly. That to the sedative develops more slowly than tolerance to morphine's sedative effect. Doses needed to relieve pain are about one-third to one-fourth those of morphine.

Methadon has been proclaimed a habit-forming drug similar to morphine and has been put under the federal narcotic laws governing the sale and dispensing of morphine and other opiate drugs. That such action was needed to prevent cases of methadon addiction appears from the Public Health Service scientists' report. They gave the drug to former morphine addicts under treatment at the Service's Lexington, Ky., Hospital. Most of these men liked the drug and said its effects were similar to

those of morphine and heroin. Typical comments were:

"This is great stuff. I wouldn't have believed it possible for a synthetic drug to be so like morphine. Can you get it outside? Will it be put under the narcotic laws? I wish I could get some to kick my next habit."

Misuse of benzedrine inhalers to get a kick or a lift is apparently widespread. Drs. R. Monroe of Orangeburg, N. Y., and Hyman J. Drell, of Chicago, found one-fourth of the inmates of the Disciplinary Barracks using these inhalers in this way. More than half of the group had been taking the drug in civilian life.

Benzedrine, or amphetamine, can be habit-forming and can cause convulsions, symptoms of insanity, high blood pressure, and even death. Doctors have long warned against its indiscriminate use and it is listed as a dangerous drug under the federal pure food, drug and cosmetic law. Many states forbid its sale without a prescription.

Benzedrine Inhalers

The inhalers, however, can be bought at every corner drug store. Those who want a benzedrine kick break the inhalers open and chew the paper strip which is impregnated with the drug. Since this method of taking it irritates the inside of the mouth, some soak the paper in coffee or an alcoholic drink to get the drug.

Others chew bits of the paper strips in chewing gum or wrap a moistened strip in cigarette paper and swallow it.

On the paper strip in the inhalers is printed: "Warning: For Inhalation Only! Unfit for Internal Use. Dangerous If Swallowed." But this warning does not seem to stop misuse of the inhalers.

Crazy ideas, hearing voices, acute pain and other abdominal symptoms suggesting appendicitis, were among the symptoms of benzedrine poisoning in the users seen by the two psychiatrists. Chronic cases showed aggressive and rebellious behavior, poor judgment, lack of self-control and loss of sleep, appetite and weight.

Injection of ascorbic acid, or vitamin C, may prove to be a successful treat-

ment for the acute poisoning. Solution of the problem of dangerous misuse of benzedrine inhalers would be development of an inhaler containing a drug effective for clearing stuffy noses that would not be absorbed from the stomach and intestines if swallowed. The present trend toward using chemicals with a local action on the blood vessels of the nose but which do not have much effect on the brain and central nervous system is praised by the psychiatrists as "a step in the right direction."

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Insecticide chemists are trying to develop a method of extracting nicotine from green tobacco plants in order to eliminate the time and trouble of drying them.

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