Narcotic Encyclopedia Article

Narcotic

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Narcotic

The term *narcotic* comes from a Greek word that means "to make numb." Its history as an English word begins in the fourteenth century. At that time and for several more centuries, the term referred to drugs that provide relief from pain and put a person into a **stupor**. These analgesic (painkilling) drugs were opium and other opiate/opioid substances (which contain opium).

During the nineteenth century, the meaning of narcotics changed to include a wider range of drugs. By the turn of the twentieth century, any drug that can lead to addiction, from heroin to cocaine, was called a narcotic. During the twentieth century, narcotics became an even less exact term. Legally, the term refers to drugs that can lead to abuse and addiction. Many drugs are subject to legal restrictions as "addictive narcotics." However, not all drugs nowadays called narcotics cause addiction. In addition, not all drugs called narcotics have painkilling effects. Although the media and the general public still use the term, scientists no longer use it in their discussions and studies of drugs.

See Also

Drugs of Abuse; Opiate and Opioid Drug Abuse.