Narcotic Encyclopedia Article

Narcotic

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Narcotic

The term derives from the Greek *narkōtikos*, meaning benumbing. It was originally used (since the fourteenth century) to refer to drugs that produced a stupor associated with pain relief (analgesia), primarily OPIUM and its derivatives, the morphine-like strong ANALGESICS, or the opium-like compounds (OPIOIDS)—these, in moderate doses, dull the senses, relieve pain, and induce profound sleep but in large doses cause stupor coma, or convulsions.

During the nineteenth century, the term was widely used to include a number of agents that produced sleep. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the term came to imply drugs that could lead to addiction, and so by the turn of the twentieth century, "narcotic" came to describe drugs as diverse as opioids and COCAINE. During the twentieth century, the term became widely used in a legal context to refer to psychoactive drugs and drugs of abuse—those subject to restriction—as "addictive narcotics," whether in fact the agents were physiologically addictive and narcotic or not. This imprecise usage has left the term nebulous, although it is still used extensively in the media and by the general population. The term is no longer used in scientific discourse to categorize drugs.

See Also

Drug Types; Opiates/Opioids; World Health Organization Expert Committee on Drug Dependence)

Bibliography

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