



# Nitazenes

## Street names:

'Proton' or 'zenes'

## What are nitazenes?

Nitazenes are very potent synthetic opioids. They act in a similar way to morphine and heroin, but are much stronger than even fentanyl.

Around 60 years ago, researchers developed nitazenes as a substitute for morphine. However, due to their high potency and risk of overdose, they were never brought to market. Nitazenes have been implicated in numerous overdose fatalities in Australia and the rest of the world.

## What do they look like?

Nitazenes are typically sold in the form of white powder, crystalline solid, or brown/yellow powder. They have also been mixed into other drugs and have been detected in street oxycodone, benzodiazepines and MDMA, as well as heroin, ketamine, and synthetic cannabinoids.

## How are they usually taken?

Nitazenes can be injected, inhaled, or swallowed (tablet form).

## Immediate effects:

When nitazenes are injected or inhaled, their effects are nearly immediate. Initially, individuals may feel a pleasurable sensation referred to as 'the rush', often accompanied by warmth flushing the skin, dryness of the mouth, and a heavy sensation in the extremities. Additional symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, and intense itching. Following the initial rush, users typically experience drowsiness for several hours, accompanied by decreased heart and respiratory rates, as well as diminished mental alertness and responsiveness to pain. Because of the high potency there is a significant risk of overdose possible death.

## Long-term effects:

The long-term effects of nitazenes haven't been studied enough to understand what the risks might be, but it's thought they may be like other opioids.

Some common long-term effects of opioids include:

- increased tolerance
- dependence
- severe constipation
- irregular menstrual periods
- impotence in males
- loss of appetite and weight
- tooth decay (from lack of saliva)

## Withdrawal

Quitting nitazenes after prolonged use presents a significant challenge as the body must adapt to functioning without them. Accounts from individuals who have used nitazenes indicate that withdrawal from these substances is akin to experiencing severe heroin withdrawal symptoms.

Reported effects during withdrawal from nitazenes include:

- profuse sweating
- restless legs
- fever
- dizziness
- flu-like symptoms
- diarrhoea
- anxiety
- panic attacks

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### Mixing nitazenes with other drugs:

Combining nitazenes with other drugs, whether they are over-the-counter medications or prescribed drugs, can lead to unpredictable and perilous outcomes.

Due to the limited research regarding the combination of nitazenes with other substances, the following information is for mixing opioids with other drugs in general:

#### Low risk:

- Mixing opioids with cannabis: While the potential risk is minimal, combining these substances can potentiate their effects.

#### Dangerous:

Mixing opioids with:

- Nitrous oxide: May result in impaired coordination, memory loss, and loss of consciousness.
- GHB/GBL/benzodiazepines/alcohol: Can lead to respiratory difficulties, loss of consciousness, vomiting, and potentially fatal consequences.
- Ketamine: May induce nausea, vomiting, loss of consciousness, and potentially fatal outcomes.
- Cocaine/ice/meth: Elevates the risk of cardiac strain. The stimulant effects of cocaine increase heart rate, while opioids decrease it. There's a risk of respiratory failure or cardiac complications if one substance wears off before the other.

### Harm reduction advice:

Avoid using on your own. Ensure there is someone sober present who can help if required.

Keep naloxone accessible. You may need multiple doses of naloxone to reverse a nitazene overdose. Fentanyl test strips won't detect nitazenes.

Don't combine nitazenes with other substances, especially other opioids. Also, steer clear of depressant drugs such as alcohol, GHB, and benzodiazepines.

If you are uncertain whether someone is experiencing an overdose, dial emergency services immediately (such as triple zero) and request an ambulance. Don't leave the individual unattended. It's important to know that **ambulance services are not obligated to involve law enforcement** in such situations.

Naloxone is available for free without a prescription in Australia as part of the Take Home Naloxone program. Naloxone can partially reverse an overdose caused by nitazenes, however, the extreme potency means that multiple administrations of naloxone are often required. Additionally, the effects of nitazenes typically last longer than naloxone, so the overdose may return after the naloxone has worn off.