

Prescription Opioids: What You Need to Know

Prescription opioids can be used to help relieve moderate-to-severe pain and are often prescribed following a surgery or injury, or for certain health conditions. These medications can be an important part of treatment but also come with serious risks. It is important to work with your health care provider to make sure you are getting the safest, most effective care.

What Are the Risks and Side Effects of Opioid Use? Prescription opioids carry serious risks of addiction and overdose, especially with prolonged use. An opioid overdose, often marked by slowed breathing, can cause sudden death. The use of prescription opioids can have a number of side effects as well, even when taken as directed:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Tolerance-meaning you might need to take more of a medication for the same pain relief● Physical dependence-meaning you have symptoms of withdrawal when a medication is stopped● Increased sensitivity to pain● Constipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth● Sleepiness and dizziness● Confusion● Depression● Low levels of testosterone that can result in lower sex drive, energy, and strength● Itching and sweating
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As many as 1 in 4 people receiving prescription opioids long term in a primary care setting struggles with addiction. * Findings from one study.

Risks are Greater With:

- History of drug misuse, substance use disorder, or overdose
- Mental health conditions (such as depression or anxiety)
- Sleep apnea
- Older age (65 years or older)
- Pregnancy

Avoid alcohol while taking prescription opioids. Also, unless specifically advised by your health care provider, medications to avoid include:

- Benzodiazepines (such as Xanax or Valium)
- Muscle relaxants (such as Soma or Flexeril)
- Hypnotics (such as Ambien or Lunesta)
- Other prescription opioids

Know Your Options: Talk to your health care provider about ways to manage your pain that don't involve prescription opioids. Some of these options **may actually work better** and have fewer risks and side effects. Options may include:

- Pain relievers such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and naproxen
- Some medications that are also used for depression or seizures
- Physical therapy and exercise
- Cognitive behavioral therapy, a psychological, goal-directed approach, in which patients learn how to modify physical, behavioral, and emotional triggers of pain and stress

If you are Prescribed Opioids for Pain:

- Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed.
- Follow up with your primary health care provider
 - Work together to create a plan on how to manage your pain

Patient Education

- o Talk about ways to help manage your pain that don't involve prescription opioids
 - o Talk about any and all concerns and side effects
- Help prevent misuse and abuse.
 - o Never sell or share prescription opioids
 - o Never use another person's prescription opioids
- Store prescription opioids in a secure place and out of reach of others (this may include visitors, children, friends, and family)
- Safely dispose of unused prescription opioids: Find your community drug take-back program or your pharmacy mail-back program, or flush them down the toilet, following guidance from the Food and Drug Administration (www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou)

Disposal in the household trash

- o If no take-back programs or DEA-registered collectors are available in your area, and there are no specific disposal instructions in the product package insert, such as flushing described above, you can also follow these simple steps to dispose of most medicines in the household trash:
 - o Mix medicines (do not crush tablets or capsules) with an unpalatable substance such as dirt, cat litter, or used coffee grounds;
 - o Place the mixture in a container such as a sealed plastic bag;
 - o Throw the container in your household trash; and
 - o Delete all personal information on the prescription label of empty pill bottles or medicine packaging, then dispose of the container.
- Visit www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose to learn about the risks of opioid abuse and overdose

If you believe you may be struggling with addiction, tell your health care provider and ask for guidance or call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP. **Use this link to locate an Opioid Treatment program:** <http://dpt2.samhsa.gov/treatment/directory.aspx>.

BE Informed: Make sure you know the name of your medication, how much and how often to take it, its potential risks & side effects.

Preventing an Opioid Overdose

Signs and Symptoms of an Opioid Overdose

During an overdose, breathing can become dangerously slowed or stopped, causing brain damage or death. It's important to recognize the signs and act fast.

Signs include:

- Small, constricted "pinpoint pupils"
- Falling asleep or loss of consciousness
- Slow, shallow breathing
- Choking or gurgling sounds
- Limp body
- Pale, blue, or cold skin

What To Do If You Think Someone Is Overdosing

It may be hard to tell if a person is high or experiencing an overdose. If you aren't sure, it is best to treat it like an overdose- you could save a life.

1. Call 911 immediately

Patient Education

2. Administer naloxone, if available
3. Try to keep the person awake and breathing
4. Lay the person on their side to prevent choking
5. Stay with him or her until emergency workers arrive

Ask your doctor about naloxone- a safe medication that can quickly stop an opioid overdose. It can be injected into the muscle or sprayed into the nose to rapidly block the effects of the opioid in the body.

(Naloxone can be obtained at several retail pharmacies without a prescription and is covered by many insurances; or can be obtained at no cost through community programs:

http://www.odh.ohio/health/vipp/drug/Project_DAWN.aspx)

References

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, American Hospital Association CS264107C: "Prescription Opioids: What You Need to Know Handout; May 9, 2016.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention: Preventing an opioid overdose: Know the signs. Save a life.

FDA Resource: Safe Disposal of Medicine:

[https://www.fda.gov/drugs/resourcesforyou/consumers/buyingusingmedicinesafely/ensuringafeuseofmedicine/safedisposalofmedicines/ucm186187.htm#household](https://www.fda.gov/drugs/resourcesforyou/consumers/buyingusingmedicinesafely/ensuringsafeuseofmedicine/safedisposalofmedicines/ucm186187.htm#household)