

Frequently Asked Questions about Prescription Opioids

Why are opioids prescribed?

- Treat medium-to-severe pain, such as pain after a surgery or injury
- Opioids lessen the feeling of pain, but do not treat the cause of it
- Opioid therapy works to decrease pain, but does not completely take it away

What are the names of some common prescription opioids?

- Morphine
- Fentanyl
- Codeine
- Hydrocodone (Vicodin)
- Oxycodone (OxyContin and Percocet)
- Hydromorphone (Dilaudid)

What side effects can opioids cause?

- Constipation
- Nausea, vomiting and dry mouth
- Sleepiness and dizziness
- Confusion
- Depression
- Itching
- Sweating
- Lower sex drive or function

What are the risks of opioid use?

- **Tolerance:** when the same amount of medicine stops working and you need a higher dose to feel the same amount of pain relief.
- **Physical dependence:** when a person experiences physical withdrawal symptoms after lowering their dosage or suddenly stopping the opioid medicine.

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- **Addiction:** a chronic brain disease that results in uncontrolled substance use, craving and life problems. Without treatment, addiction gets worse and can result in disability or early death. Addiction to opioids is also called Opioid Use Disorder (OUD).
- **Overdose:** when taking too much medicine or taking it in a different way than prescribed hurts your body or causes death.

How do I decide whether or not to take opioids?

- Talk to your doctor about other treatment options such as:
 - » Pain relievers like acetaminophen, ibuprofen and naproxen
 - » Some medicines that are also used for depression or seizures
 - » Non-drug or complimentary treatments such as physical therapy or acupuncture
- Talk to your doctor about the risks. We are all at risk for side effects or developing an OUD, but you might be at higher risk if you:
 - » Have a history of drug misuse, substance use disorder or overdose
 - » Have mental health conditions like depression or anxiety
 - » Are age 65 or older
- What type of pain are you experiencing?
 - » Opioids may be better at treating severe pain due to cancer and acute pain following a severe injury or major surgery
 - » Opioids do not work as well for chronic pain that is not caused by cancer

What should I do if I decide to take prescription opioids?

- Talk to your doctor about about the possible side effects and risks.
- Watch for side effects and signs of developing OUD, like:
 - » Unusual moodiness or bursts of temper
 - » Cravings for more opioids
 - » Taking more medicine than prescribed
- If you experience side effects or signs of OUD, talk to your doctor about this.

How do I take opioids safely?

- Do not take opioids at the same time as:
 - » Alcohol
 - » Benzodiazepines like Xanax or Valium
 - » Muscle relaxants like Soma or Flexeril
 - » Sedatives like Ambien or Lunesta
 - » Other prescription opioids
- Follow your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.
- Do not share medicines with family or friends. Opioids do not work the same for everyone.
- Do not stop taking these medicines all at once if they were prescribed for longer than a few weeks, because you may have withdrawal symptoms.
- Store them safely where other people, including children, can't get to them.
- Throw them out safely, by returning to your local disposal program.