

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 healthcare 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:

- Confusion
- Constipation
- Depression
- Increased sensitivity to pain
- Itching and sweating
- Low levels of testosterone that can result in lower sex drive, energy, and strength
- Nausea, vomiting and dry mouth
- Physical dependence – meaning you have symptoms of withdrawal when a medication is stopped
- Sleepiness and dizziness
- Tolerance – meaning you might need to take more of a medication for the same pain relief

Risks Are Greater With:

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

AS MANY AS
1 IN 4
PEOPLE receiving long-term
prescription opioids
in a primary care
setting, struggles
with addiction.

**Findings from one study.*

Avoid alcohol while taking prescription opioids. Medications also to avoid, unless specifically advised by your healthcare provider, are:

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



Be Informed!

Make sure you know the name of your medication, how much and how often to take it, and it's potential risks and side effects.

Know Your Options

Talk to your healthcare 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:

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

If You are Prescribed Opioids for Pain

- Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed
- Follow up with your primary healthcare provider within 7 days
 - **Work together to create a plan on how to manage your pain**
 - **Talk about ways to help manage your pain that don't involve prescription opioids**
 - **Talk about any and all concerns and side effects**
- Help prevent misuse and abuse
 - **Never sell or share prescription opioids**
 - **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 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)
- 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 healthcare provider and ask for guidance or call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1.800.662.HELP

Learn More: cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/guideline.html