



Safe use of opioids

About 100 million people live with chronic pain. It is the most common reason people see their doctor.

Opioid medications are one option for treating pain, but are not the right choice for everyone.



Balanced information for better care

Opioid prescriptions: Protect your family

1. Lock 'em up!

Store all opioids in a locked place.

2. Throw 'em out!

No longer taking opioids?

- Look for take-back events in your city or town.
- Flush them down the toilet.
- Mix with an unappealing substance like used coffee grounds or kitty litter and place in the trash.
- Fold patches in half, adhesive side together, and discard.

Protect yourself

1. Combinations can be dangerous!

Talk to your doctor if you are using or taking:

- alcohol
- sleep aids
- antianxiety medications
- opioids prescribed by another health care provider

2. Take as prescribed.

3. Keep track of when you take a dose.

4. Watch out for side effects.

5. Do not drive after taking an opioid.

6. Do not share your medication with others.

What works for you may be too much for someone else!

What are opioids?

Opioids are medications related to morphine.

Commonly prescribed opioids are:

- hydrocodone (Vicodin)
- oxycodone (Percocet)
- methadone
- codeine and many others

They can sometimes help reduce pain, but also have many side effects.

Side effects of opioids

Taking opioids may cause you to:

- be constipated
- feel itchy
- feel tired
- feel nauseous or vomit

Other serious risks of opioids

Risks of opioid medications increase the longer you use them and the higher the doses:

- addiction or dependence
- overdose
- falling and breaking a bone
- low testosterone
- infection

Be sure to talk to your doctor if you experience side effects or are concerned about the risks of taking opioids.

Reducing or stopping opioids

Opioids can reduce pain in the short term. It is healthier to stop using opioid medications as soon as possible.

Depending on how long you have been taking an opioid, your doctor may recommend that you stop by tapering, or gradually lowering your daily dose of opioid. If you have side effects, are concerned about other risks, or are no longer feeling better on opioids, ask your doctor about stopping.

What else can I do?

Participation in many activities may help with your pain. Activities include:

- exercise
- Tai Chi
- weight training
- massage
- yoga
- relaxation

Always discuss your participation in these activities or interests with your doctor.



Other prescription options

Your doctor may recommend a different prescription medication to treat your pain. The specific medication depends on the kind of pain you have. These other medications may be taken by mouth or applied to the skin. Depending on the location of your pain, there may be procedures that can help reduce your pain.

Combating the risk of overdose

Educate yourself and your family about the signs and symptoms and what to do in case of opioid overdose.

Naloxone (Narcan) is a medication that can reverse the effect of opioid medications and may save a person who has overdosed. It can be given through the nose or into the muscle. Ask your doctor if a prescription for naloxone is right for you or your family member.

More information

- **American Chronic Pain Association—**
www.theacpa.org
 - **Your local healthcare center**
 - **Concerned about your opioid use? Get links to patient information around opioid abuse and treatment at www.SAMHSA.gov**
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These are general recommendations only; specific clinical decisions should be made by the treating physician based on an individual patient's clinical condition.

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