



Managing persistent pain

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

This brochure will help you understand your treatment goals and options without over-reliance on prescription painkillers that can be habit-forming, known as *opioids*.



Pharmaceutical Assistance
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Balanced information for better care



What else can I do?

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

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

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

Work with your doctor to focus on meeting your own functional goals as part of your pain relief plan:

1. If you could be more able to do one thing for yourself, what would it be?
2. What activities do you need help to perform that you'd rather be able to do for yourself?
3. What are your concerns about functioning your best at work, home, or in leisure activities?
4. What could help you be more independent?

What are opioids?

Opioids are powerful prescription painkillers derived from or related to morphine.

Commonly prescribed opioids include:

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

These drugs can sometimes help reduce pain, but also carry important risks.

Side effects of opioids

Taking opioids may cause:

- unsteadiness on your feet
- constipation
- tiredness
- itching
- nausea or vomiting

Other serious risks of opioids

The risks of opioid drugs increase with longer use and higher doses:

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

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, but are not ideal for long-term use, unless a person has cancer or another very serious chronic disease. For everyone else, 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.

Other medication options to treat pain

Your health care professional has many options for managing pain, and may recommend a different treatment, either prescription or over-the-counter. The specific choice will depend 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.

Useful resources in PA:

- **PA PrimeTime Health:** <http://goo.gl/9EeeFZ>
Programs:
 - Healthy Steps in Motion
 - Chronic disease self-management programs
 - **PA Area Agencies on Aging:** <http://goo.gl/7YsxXf>
 - **PA Link to Aging and Disability Resources**
<http://goo.gl/6hIno8> | Helpline: 1-866-286-3636
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Opioid prescriptions: Protect yourself

1. Combinations can be dangerous.

Talk to your doctor if you are using or taking:

- alcohol
- sleeping pills
- 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.

Protect your family

1. Secure your pain prescriptions.

Store all opioids in a locked place.

2. Throw 'em out!

No longer taking opioids?

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

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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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