



Tapering opioid medications

Opioids can be addictive and cause harmful side effects. They are also less able to relieve pain over time.

Because of this, your healthcare professional may recommend you reduce the use of these medications. By focusing on non-opioid options, you can still treat your pain and improve function.

QUESTION	RESPONSE
<p><i>I have been on this dose for years. Why do I need to change it now?</i></p>	<p>Lowering your opioid dose can help reduce your chance of side effects like constipation, sedation, low testosterone, and accidental overdose, among others. As you get older, your body will get more sensitive to these side effects, which makes the medication riskier over time.</p>
<p><i>What can I do to manage my pain if I am not using an opioid?</i></p>	<p>Your healthcare professional can recommend many options for treating pain, including non-drug options as well as medicine options. Non-drug options such as exercise, tai chi, or acupuncture can also help relieve pain and improve your ability to perform daily tasks. Combining these options while reducing opioid doses can help you do the things you enjoy.</p>
<p><i>Do I have to stop opioids completely?</i></p>	<p>For some people, tapering opioid medications down to zero may be the safest treatment option. For others, the goal may be to reduce doses to decrease the risk of the side effects and harms these medications can cause.</p>
<p><i>Won't my pain increase as my opioid dose is reduced?</i></p>	<p>Many people who have tapered to lower doses or stopped opioid medications altogether report no difference in pain relief. Some with chronic pain who have stopped taking opioids report feeling better than when they were taking opioids, though these benefits can take time to develop.</p>
<p><i>Will I have symptoms of withdrawal when I reduce my opioid dose?</i></p>	<p>If you have been taking opioids for a long time, your body may be used to them. A taper plan developed with your healthcare professional can help reduce your risk of withdrawal symptoms. He or she can also recommend supportive medications and/or adjust the taper plan based on your response.</p>

These are general recommendations only; specific medical decisions should be made by the treating clinician based on an individual patient's clinical condition.

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