

Questions About Taking Pain Medicine if You are Chemically Dependent

If you are chemically dependent and need to take pain medicine for surgery or an injury, the following information will answer some questions you may have. Ask your nurse or doctor any specific questions you have about your recovery.

What Medicines Can You Take After Surgery or for an Injury?

There are two classes of pain medicines you may be able to take after surgery or after suffering an injury.

- **Over-the-counter:** This type of medicine is available without a prescription. Choices include acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (known as NSAIDS) such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®).
- **Prescription medicines:** This type of medicine is available only with a doctor's prescription. Opioids (or narcotics) include morphine, codeine, Vicodin® and Dilaudid®, among others. They are appropriate for short-term use as prescribed by your doctor.

Will You Get Enough Pain Medicine if You Tell Your Nurse or Doctor You are Chemically Dependent?

It is important to tell your doctor about your chemical dependency past or present. He or she will adjust your medicine as needed.

People who have chemical dependency usually have a higher tolerance to pain medicines. Your doctor will order a medicine and dose to relieve your pain. Be sure to tell your nurse or doctor how well the medicine controls your pain or if you feel any unusual symptoms.

Should You Take Pain Medicine if Your AA Group Says Not to Take Opioids (Narcotics)?

Taking medicine for pain under your doctor's supervision may shorten your recovery time. You should not be in jeopardy of losing your sobriety.

Without taking medicine to control your pain, you cannot deep breathe and do the therapies needed for recovery. You may also get pneumonia, blood clots or increased stiffness and pain, all of which could increase the time you stay in the hospital.

What Happens if the Pain Medicine Causes Cravings?

If you feel cravings and are concerned about having a relapse, call your sponsor, and/or ask to see the hospital's chemical dependency counselor or pain specialists.

A pain specialist can make a plan with you to taper and stop the medicine in as short a time as possible. You will not be able to refill the prescription or use the medicine differently than described in your treatment plan.

Will You be Able to Take Pain Medicine When You Return Home?

When released from the hospital, most people still have pain and need to take some pain medicine for a short time.

Talk with your doctor about taking over-the-counter pain medicine. You may be able to take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®) to control pain as your condition improves. Be sure to take your medicine as directed.

Many pain medicines also contain acetaminophen (Tylenol®). It is important to know if you are taking a pain medicine that has acetaminophen. You should not take more than 4,000 mg of acetaminophen a day from all of your medicines. Taking more than that could harm your liver. Your doctor will tell you how much to take and how often to take it.

Medicine:

How much to take:

How often to take:

Special instructions:

What if You Feel You Cannot Stop Taking the Pain Medicine?

If you feel like you cannot stop taking pain medicine, talk with your doctor about tapering off the medicine.