

Should You Use a Prescription Opioid Medicine for Short-term Pain Relief?

Managing Your Pain

It is normal to feel pain while you recover from surgery, illness or an accident. You will receive a plan to manage your pain. You and your health care provider will talk about your options. Some of these treatments are useful for some situations but not for others.

- **Be active.** Do as many of your regular activities as you can. Moving around will help prevent blood clots or constipation (unable to have a regular bowel movement).
- **Use self-care.** Mild exercise like gentle stretching or walking, redirecting your attention, rest, heat or ice, or meditation can help reduce your pain.
- **Try other options.** Your health care provider will help you decide if physical therapy, chiropractic or acupuncture treatments are right for you.
- **Ask your health care provider if over-the-counter or prescription pain medicine is right for you.**

Opioid Medicine

Along with the rest of your plan, opioid medicine may help you remain active. Opioids may be taken as a capsule, tablet or liquid by mouth. Most prescriptions are for no more than 3 to 5 days so side effects are less likely.

It is important you take your medicine as directed. Opioids have serious side effects that can limit your activities and cause new health concerns. (See the other side.)

Opioids are addictive. That is why the plan you are making with your health care provider is so important. Never take more pills than are

My Values and Preferences

- I need to be alert. I can handle some pain.
- I do not want the side effects opioids can cause.
- I want quick pain control. I will be careful with side effects.

prescribed or for longer than you are supposed to. Never share your medicine with anyone else.

There are many types of opioids, such as morphine, codeine, oxycodone (OxyContin® and Percocet®), hydrocodone (Norco® and Vicodin®) and hydromorphone (Dilaudid®).

It is important to talk with your health care provider about what other medicines, alcohol and recreational drugs you take. Together, you and your health care provider will decide if opioid medicine is right for you.

What to Ask Your Health Care Provider

1. Is an opioid the best option for me?
2. How long should I take it?
3. How can I reduce possible side effects?
4. Will the opioid affect other medicines I am taking or interfere with other health concerns?
5. What do I do when my prescription runs out?
6. Will I have a taper schedule for weaning off the opioid?
7. What should I do with leftover pills?



Up to 1 in 4 people who receives prescription opioids for long-term (chronic) pain struggles with addiction.

Possible Risks and Side Effects

Addiction

- Opioids are highly addictive when used for longer periods of time.
- Anyone can become addicted.
- More than 2 million Americans abuse opioids.¹
- 2 million Americans misused prescription opioids for the first time in 2017.²
- About 1 in 10 people who misuse prescription opioids becomes addicted to opioids.²

1. National Institute on Drug Abuse
2. Addiction Center

Overdose or death

- Opioids can cause overdose or death.
 - On average, 130 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.¹
 - Nearly 70% of the more than 70,200 drug overdose deaths in 2017 involved an opioid.¹
- You may have higher risks for overdose or death if you have sleep apnea, drink alcohol, or if you take a benzodiazepine (sedative) medicine.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Tolerance

- The longer you take opioids, the more your body gets used to them. Over time, you will need to take more to get the same pain relief. This can lead to withdrawal (side effects) when you stop taking them.

Feeling drowsy or sleepy

- These side effects may make some of your regular activities unsafe.
- Do not drive, work, make important decisions or use machinery without talking to your health care provider or member of your health care team.

Upset stomach or throwing up

- Opioids slow down how your body digests food. This can lead to an upset stomach (nausea) or throwing up (vomiting).
- To prevent this side effect, eat smaller meals more often and stay active.

Unable to have regular bowel movements

- Opioids slow down how your body digests food. This can cause your bowel movements to not be regular (constipation).
- To prevent this side effect, you need to be active, eat more foods high in fiber and drink enough water. Talk with your health care provider if you need to take a stool softener or laxative.

Depression

- Taking an opioid for 6 months or longer may cause depression.
- If you have depression, opioids can make it worse.

Risks to others

- Keeping opioids you no longer need can be unsafe for others. (Ask your pharmacist how to get rid of unused opioids.)
 - Children or pets may accidentally swallow them.
 - Teens or adults may take the opioids not prescribed for them on purpose.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the total “economic burden” of prescription opioid misuse in the U.S. is \$78.5 billion a year. This includes the costs of health care, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement.