

Opioids



What are opioids and how do they affect the body?

Opioids are a class of drugs used to manage/reduce pain resulting from surgery, injury, or illness. Those who take opioids will feel relaxed and happy, but also experience drowsiness, confusion, nausea, constipation, and slowed breathing. Common types of opioids prescribed are oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), morphine, and methadone. All opioids have the risk of addiction. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid pain reliever and has the same side effects and risk as other opioids.

Drug misuse is when a prescription drug is used for a purpose other than its intended purpose.

Drug abuse is the use of a medication without a prescription, in a way other than as prescribed, or for the experience or feelings elicited.

The over-consumption of opioids can cause serious health risks.

Opioids have been shown to affect the body in different ways:

NERVOUS SYSTEM Pain sensations

RESPIRATORY SYSTEM Slowed breathing, and when taken in excess can result in death from respiratory suppression

CIRCULATORY SYSTEM Slowed heart function

DIGESTIVE SYSTEM Severe constipation and bowel obstruction

SKELETAL SYSTEM Bone thinning

Possible Causes of Opioid Misuse



Higher Risk of Injury at Work

Agricultural work ranks among the most hazardous. Workers are at risk for fatal and nonfatal injuries including ergonomic injuries from repetitive motions.



Avoiding Care / Self-Medicating

If someone is **injured or in pain but won't seek clinical care**, they are more likely to self-medicate and potentially misuse opioids to reduce/manage the pain.



Over-prescription of Opioids

An opioid may be prescribed, even if an alternative is available, for **a period longer than needed to recover**. This can lead to the misuse or sharing of medication.



Alternatives to opioids for pain management

There are non-opioid treatments that can help people with chronic (long-term) pain. Some common painkillers that can be purchased without a prescription may relieve many kinds of pain. Providers can also prescribe other kinds of non-opioid medications for chronic pain treatment. In addition, there are different kinds of therapy and exercise that can help. A health care provider can help patients choose the best treatment option for them.

Preparing for a visit to the doctor

- Work with your provider to establish a realistic plan for pain management and functional goals for your treatment.
- Let your provider know if you have taken opioids in the past. This assists your provider with figuring out appropriate dosing adjustments and minimizing withdrawal symptoms.
- Ask if there are alternatives - acetaminophen (Tylenol) and NSAIDs (ibuprofen for example) for mild to moderate pain without ever starting opioids or a lidocaine patch for pain that can be localized and directly applied to the injured area.
- Ask your provider: How long should you use opioids and when can you try alternative treatments?
- Understand when opioids are not helpful. Examples include chronic conditions like fibromyalgia and recurrent migraines.
- Follow up with the provider in 1 to 4 weeks if you started taking a medication that includes opioids or if the dose has been changed, to evaluate whether you feel good or bad with the use of the medication.



Find more information

- SAMHSA's National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP
- SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
- Resources from the Centers for Disease Control:
 - *Information for Patients:* www.cdc.gov/opioids/patients/index.html
 - *Nonopioid Therapies:* www.cdc.gov/opioids/patients/options.html
 - *What You Need to Know About Treatment and Recovery:* www.cdc.gov/rxawareness/pdf/Treatment-and-Recovery-Fact-Sheet.pdf
 - *Take Action to Prevent Addiction:* <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/Prevent-Addiction-Fact-Sheet.pdf>



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