



Opioids

Pain medications and safety

What is an opioid?

Opioids are a class of drugs commonly used to relieve pain. Less often, they can be used to help a cough or diarrhea.

Certain opioids can be obtained by a prescription from a doctor; common examples are oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet), hydrocodone (Norco, Lortab, Vicodin), hydromorphone (Dilaudid), morphine (MSContin), codeine (Tylenol #3), and many more.

These drugs are often prescribed after a surgery or injury to patients who may or may not have ever taken opioids before. They also are prescribed to patients who take them for long-term management of pain caused by various medical conditions.

Opioids can cause relaxing and euphoric effects, potentially causing people taking them to be at risk for addiction and overdose. People are especially at risk for addiction and overdose when opioid pills (a common form for opioids) have been crushed or taken by a route other than by mouth, such as snorting or injecting. As with any medication, these drugs should be taken exactly as the doctor prescribed them.

Negative effects of opioids:

This class of drugs can cause drowsiness, constipation, and can slow a person's breathing. When taken in overdose, breathing can even stop.

There is a high risk for physical dependence with this type of drug. When a person is physically dependent on a drug, their body can be put into a state of withdrawal when they stop taking the medicine. Common withdrawal symptoms for opioids include sleeplessness, restlessness, vomiting, diarrhea, cold flashes, muscle and bone pain, and involuntary leg movements. Withdrawal is one reason why it is important to talk to a doctor not only when taking opioids, but also when stopping the use of opioids.

Some opioids, such as heroin, are illegal. Recently, there has been a rise in the abuse of illegally purchased fentanyl, an opioid that is 50 to 100 times more powerful than heroin.

Overdose and Safety:

Signs of overdose include:

- drowsiness or unconsciousness
- small pupils
- snoring or choking-like sounds
- changes in skin color to a bluish/purple or even a gray
- slow or absent breathing

If any of these symptoms develop or if an adult has received a dose that is higher than recommended by the prescriber, they should be seen by a health care professional, especially if the

person does not take opioids routinely. Any time a person is unconscious or has difficulty breathing, an ambulance should be called by dialing 911. Children may be unusually sensitive to opioids; any time a child gets even a small amount, the situation should be evaluated by a health care professional. One way to do this quickly is by calling the poison center and speaking with a highly trained pharmacist or nurse.



If you have questions about **Opioids** please don't wait for symptoms to appear!

Call 1-800-222-1222.

Specially trained pharmacists and nurses are available 24/7 to assist you with your emergency and answer your questions!

Copy in this fact sheet has been adapted from The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at CDC.gov and National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens at Teens.drugabuse.gov

Oklahoma Center for Poison and Drug Information website:

Oklahomapoison.org

To avoid accidental overdose when prescribed opioids

- Make sure your doctor knows about any other medications you take, including over-the-counter medications and supplements.
- Avoid alcohol, antihistamines, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, illicit drugs, sedatives, or muscle relaxers; taking these drugs in combination with opioids could possibly lead to severe breathing difficulty.

What is the opioid epidemic, and what can I do?

Deaths from drug overdoses have been on the rise, and most of those recorded involve an opioid. Prescription opioids have been found to be a particular problem in this epidemic. The best thing you can do to avoid injury to you or your loved ones is to know your options:

- When faced with an injury or surgery, talk to your doctor about other ways to manage your pain.
- Consider taking over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen before requesting a prescription from your doctor. Remember to follow the package instructions, even for medicine that doesn't require a prescription.
- Physical therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy can be helpful in the management of pain. Discuss these options with your doctor.
- Properly disposal of unwanted, used or expired medications.
- Store pain medications in a medication lock box or in a safe, secure location.
- Never give pain medications to others for whom they were not prescribed.