



Prescription Opioids

What You Need to Know

Prescription opioids can be used to help relieve moderate-to-severe pain and are sometimes prescribed following a surgery or injury, or for certain painful health conditions. These medications can be an important part of treatment, but they also come with **serious risks**. It is important to work with your clinician to get the safest, most effective care.

What are the Risks and Side Effects of Opioid Use?

Prescription opioids carry serious risks of addiction and overdose, especially with prolonged use. An opioid overdose, often marked by slowed breathing, can cause sudden death. The use of prescription opioids can have a number of **side effects** as well, even when taken as directed, including:

Tolerance (Meaning you might need to take more of your opioid medication for the same pain relief)	Physical Dependence (Meaning you have symptoms of withdrawal when your opioid medication is stopped)
Constipation	Sleepiness and Dizziness
Increased Sensitivity to Pain	Confusion
Lower Energy, Strength, and Sex Drive Due to Low Levels of Testosterone	Depression
Nausea, Vomiting, and Dry Mouth	Itching and Sweating

As many as **1 in 4** people receiving prescription opioids long term in a primary care setting struggles with addiction.

It only takes **fewer than 7 days** of opioid therapy to develop a long-term opioid use disorder.

Risks are Greater with:

- + Mental health conditions (such as depression or anxiety)
- + Personal or family history of drug misuse, substance use disorder, or overdose
- + Older age (65 years or older)
- + Sleep apnea or organ dysfunction

Avoid Alcohol

while taking prescription opioids. Also, unless specifically advised by your clinician, avoid certain medications:

- + Benzodiazepines (such as Xanax or Valium)
- + Muscle relaxants (such as Soma or Flexeril)
- + Hypnotics (such as Ambien or Lunesta)
- + Other prescription opioids



Compass Opioid Prescribing + Treatment Guidance Toolkit

Know Your Options

Talk to your clinician about ways to manage your pain that don't involve prescription opioids. Many nonopioid medications **actually work better** and have fewer risks and side effects. Options may include:

- + Over-the-counter pain relievers like acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Motrin)
- + Topical medications, such as lidocaine patches (Lidoderm) or diclofenac gel (Voltaren)
- + Nonopioid prescription medications that are also used for depression or seizures
- + Physical therapy, stretching, and exercise
- + Cognitive behavioral therapy = a psychological, goal-directed approach, in which patients learn how to modify physical, behavioral, and emotional triggers of pain and stress.

If You Are Prescribed an Opioid Medication for Pain

- + Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed.
- + You may also be prescribed a medication called naloxone (Narcan) that will reverse the effects of your opioid medication if an overdose is suspected.
- + Unless instructed otherwise by your clinician, continue using your nonopioid medications and therapies as primary treatment of your pain.
- + In most cases, reserve use of your opioid medication for severe or "breakthrough" pain.
- + Follow up with your prescribing clinician within a week.
 - + Talk about any concerns and side effects related to your opioid medication.
 - + Work together to create a plan on how to manage your pain without prescription opioids.
- + Help prevent misuse and abuse.
 - + Never sell or share prescription opioids.
 - + Never use another person's prescription opioids.
- + Store prescription opioids in a secure place and out of reach of others (this may include visitors, children, friends, family, pets).
- + Safely dispose of unused prescription opioids.
 - + Find your community drug take-back program, pharmacy drop box, or other ways to properly dispose at www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou.
- + If you believe you may be struggling with addiction, tell your clinicians and ask for help, or call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP

Adopted from the CDC and AHA Patient Opioid Factsheet

<https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/aha-patient-opioid-factsheet-a.pdf>

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