

Beyond Opioids

Pain can be debilitating.

But you don't have to trade physical pain for the pain of addiction.

There are other ways to manage pain that don't involve opioids. They're safer, and often times they work even better. Different types of pain require different treatments, and can include:

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®). These are often more effective than opioids. Studies have shown that combining these types of pain relievers is more powerful than opioids for the treatment of acute pain.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy. A psychological, goal-directed approach in which patients learn how to modify physical, behavioral, and emotional triggers of pain and stress.
- Exercise, including physical therapy. Physical activity can lessen pain, improve physical functioning, and quality of life. This can be helpful for weight loss, which can often also relieve some types of pain.
- Medications for depression or for seizures. The painkilling mechanism of these drugs still isn't fully understood, but it's thought that they reduce pain signals from the spinal cord to the brain.
- Interventional therapies (injections) can block pain signals or decrease inflammation. Such therapies can sometimes significantly reduce pain production or transmission.
- Other therapies such as acupuncture and massage can also be helpful. For more information on using complementary approaches to manage pain, visit: <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/pain/chronic.htm#hed7>

Opioids: Blessing or Curse?

We've come to think of opioids as powerful painkillers. In actuality, they're only mild to moderate painkillers.

What they are powerful at eliminating is the experience of suffering that can come with pain.

This potent calming effect can be helpful in certain cases, but can bring risks of its own in many other cases.

Our brains actually make their own opioids that help block pain and make us feel calm and happy. But if we're experiencing severe or chronic pain, sometimes our natural opioids can't keep up. Just like natural opioids, manufactured opioids attach to brain cells and activate them. But they can flood our brains with too much, leading to feeling "high" and training our brains to want more and more, or possibly even shutting down our breathing.

Can we get the pain-relieving benefits of medical opioids without risking addiction? Yes - if we limit their use to very specific cases, if we're proactive and make plans with our doctor for safe use and disposal before we begin to take them, and then if we stick to the plan.

Sometimes it's too dangerous for a person to take opioids because:

- Some medical conditions increase the risk of dangerous side effects, such as sleep apnea, obesity, anxiety or depression, or fibromyalgia.
- Some mental health or substance abuse problems can increase the risk of opioid abuse and addiction: severe depression or anxiety, heavy tobacco use, or a personal or family history of substance abuse.

Your doctor may ask about these risk factors before prescribing a new opioid medication. Be honest in your answers, and if you have any questions - ask them! Stop problems before they start. For more information, check out: www.teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-pain-medications-opioids



If it turns out that opioids are an appropriate option for your pain management, there's a lot you can do to stay safe.

Tell ALL your providers about ALL of the drugs you're taking,

because opioids can have dangerous, or even deadly, interactions with many other medications. Each doctor needs to know about all the drugs you're taking: over-the-counter, nutritional supplements, alcohol, and illegal or recreational substances. Your providers won't report you to law enforcement for using illegal drugs unless she/he thinks you are a danger to yourself or others. It's in your best interest to provide complete, accurate information.

Order all your medications through the same pharmacy whenever possible. Their computer systems can automatically detect dangerous drug interactions.

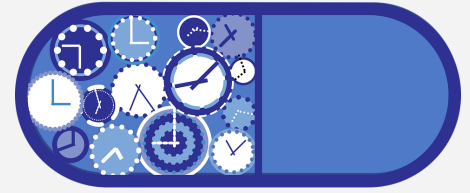
Read and follow the instructions and warnings on the drug safety sheets that come with your prescriptions.

Report any side effects to your doctor right away, such as constipation, nausea, mood changes or confusion.

When you've stopped using the opioids, don't share them with others or keep the rest "just in case." Medications can be polluting, so don't put them in the trash or flush down the toilet. Instead, bring them to the anonymous collections drop box at the Cook County Law Enforcement Center. More information on the drop-off can be found at: www.co.cook.mn.us/index.php/2016-05-12-15-19-25/

Taking care of ourselves can take a lot of support. We're here to help! Ask a nurse or provider if you'd like to talk.

Know the Signs. Save a Life.



Opioid Overdose Basics

Prescription opioids (like hydrocodone, oxycodone, and morphine) and illicit opioids (like heroin and illegally made fentanyl) are powerful drugs that have a risk of a potentially fatal overdose.

Anyone who uses opioids can experience an overdose, but certain factors may increase risk including, but not limited to:

- Combining opioids with alcohol or certain other drugs
- Taking high daily dosages of prescription opioids
- Taking more opioids than prescribed
- Taking illicit or illegal opioids, like heroin or illicitly-manufactured fentanyl, that could possibly contain unknown or harmful substances
- Certain medical conditions, such as sleep apnea, or reduced kidney or liver function
- Age greater than 65 years old

Death from an opioid overdose happens when too much of the drug overwhelms the brain and interrupts the body's natural drive to breathe.

Learn more about opioids to protect yourself and your loved ones from opioid abuse, addiction, and overdose:

www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose

PREVENTING AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

Signs and Symptoms of an Opioid Overdose

During an overdose, breathing can be dangerously slowed or stopped, causing brain damage or death. It's important to recognize the signs and act fast. Signs include:

- Small, constricted "pinpoint pupils"
- Falling asleep or loss of consciousness
- Slow, shallow breathing
- Choking or gurgling sounds
- Limp body
- Pale, blue, or cold skin



What To Do If You Think Someone Is Overdosing

It may be hard to tell if a person is high or experiencing an overdose. If you aren't sure, it's best to treat it like an overdose—you could save a life.

1. Call 911 immediately.
2. Administer naloxone, if available.
3. Try to keep the person awake and breathing.
4. Lay the person on their side to prevent choking.
5. Stay with the person emergency workers arrive.



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