

Let's Talk About Pain Medicines



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How are prescription opioids different than other pain medicines?

People think of opioids as illegal drugs, like heroin. Some prescription pain medicines are opioids too.

Prescription opioids:

They work in the brain to block pain. You need a prescription to buy them. You may feel really good when you take them. You can get addicted to prescription opioids.



Names of some prescription opioids:

- Hydrocodone (Vicodin[®], Lortab[®], Lorcet[®])
- Oxycodone (OxyContin[®], Percodan[®], Percocet[®])
- Morphine (Kadian[®], Avinza[®], MS Contin[®])
- Codeine
- Fentanyl (Duragesic[®])
- Tramadol (Ultram[®])
- Methadone

Other pain medicines:

They work in the part of your body where you feel the pain, not in the brain. You can buy some of them without a prescription. You cannot get addicted to most of them.

There are many other pain medicines. Here are a few:

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol[®])
- Ibuprofen (Advil[®], Motrin[®])
- Naproxen (Aleve[®])

You can get other non-opioid pain medicines with a prescription. Ask your doctor if they are right for you.

Ways to take opioid medicines

1. Pill



2. Liquid



3. Patch



History of opioids

- At first, people did not know that opioids were so addictive. Many people got opioids to treat pain. People could easily get opioids from a doctor, family, or friends.
- People of all ages can get addicted to opioids. Some people use an illegal and dangerous drug called heroin to satisfy their cravings for opioids.
- You might have heard about the drug fentanyl. It is an opioid medicine that is very powerful. It usually comes in a patch that you put on your skin. It must be used properly. It is even more dangerous than heroin if it is injected into your blood. Many people have died from injecting fentanyl thinking it was something else like heroin.
- Over 130 people die every day in the United States from opioid overdose. It is a crisis.
- Sometimes the best choice is an opioid medicine. You must use it the way your doctor or pharmacist tells you. Use it only for the pain it was prescribed for.
- Today doctors are usually more careful about prescribing opioids.

Tolerance, Dependence and Addiction

If you take opioid medicines long enough, 2 things will happen:

1. You will develop a **tolerance**. This means you will need larger doses (more opioid medicine) to help your pain.
2. You will develop **dependence**. This means that if you suddenly stop taking your opioid medicine, you could get sick: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and severe stomach pains. You will need to take less and less opioid medicine before stopping.

You can also become **addicted**. This means that your body needs more opioid medicine to feel good. If you feel like you need more medicine than the doctor gave you, tell your doctor.

When should you take your medicine? How much medicine can you take?

You must understand how much opioid medicine to take. And you must understand when to take the medicine. This can be confusing.

Look at the instructions on this label:

- If you feel less pain, just take 1 tablet, not 2.
- If you have less pain, wait longer to take the next dose or stop taking it.
- If your pain is very bad, take the next dose as soon as you can (4 hours after the last dose).
- If you feel you need to take more medicine before the 4 hours is up, you must call your doctor. **Remember, medicine might not make all the pain go away.**
- Never take more opioid medicine than your doctor tells you.



Naloxone: A drug that can stop an overdose:

- Naloxone is good to have when you take opioids.
- Naloxone is a medicine that might stop an opioid overdose. It is also called: Narcan[®], Evzio[®] or Narcan[®] Nasal Spray
- Naloxone can save your life if you took too much opioid medicine and are not conscious (cannot wake up).
- Naloxone is given as a nose spray or a shot (injection).
- You can get a prescription for naloxone if you are taking opioid medicines.
- At some pharmacies, anyone can get naloxone without a prescription. Find out if there is a pharmacy near you:
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/opioids/naloxone-pharmacies.htm>



Give naloxone and call 911 if you think someone has overdosed.

Signs of Opioid Overdose

- Sleepy and unresponsive; OR awake, but unable to talk
- Slow or shallow breathing
- Choking sounds or vomiting
- Skin pale or clammy
- Slow or no pulse

Sometimes you cannot take your opioid medicine with other medicines

It can be dangerous to take your opioid medicine with other types of medicines. Or the opioid may not work as well. Other medicines include:

- prescription medicines ordered by a doctor
- over-the-counter medicines you get without a prescription
- herbals, plants and other home remedies

If you are taking an opioid medicine and you need other medicine, you should:

1. Make a list of all the medicines and herbals you are taking. Show it to your doctor or pharmacist to learn if it is safe to take them together.
2. Always ask your doctor first to make sure it is safe to take new medicines while you are taking an opioid medicine.



Some important examples:

1. **Acetaminophen (Tylenol®):** Some opioid medicines have acetaminophen in them. If you take another medicine with acetaminophen at the same time you could overdose on acetaminophen. This could make your liver stop working and you will die.
2. **Some cough medicines have alcohol in them.** You cannot drink any alcohol the same day you take an opioid medicine. Some cough medicines have alcohol in them. Do not use cough medicines that have alcohol the same day you take opioid medicines.
3. **Benzodiazepines (“Benzos”):** These are medicines used to treat anxiety. If you take an opioid at the same time, there is an increased risk of overdose or death. Some examples are: alprazolam (Xanax®), lorazepam (Ativan®), diazepam (Valium®).

Keep opioid medicines in a safe location

- **Put opioid medicines in a lock box or locked drawer.** Hide the key to make sure kids and other adults cannot get your medicines. This will stop young children from accidentally swallowing them.

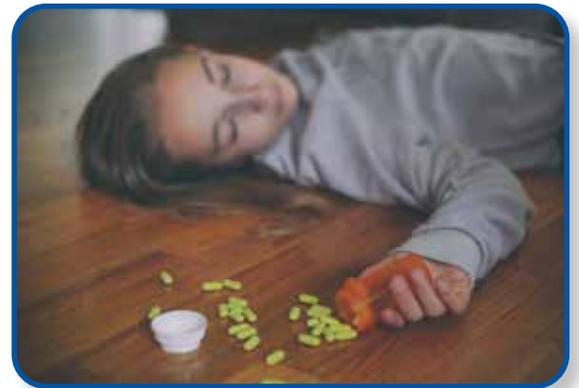
Never leave medicine on your countertops, tables, or nightstands where other people can see and take them.

- **Keep opioids in original containers.** Then you will not get them mixed up with other medicines.

- **Always know how many opioid pills you should have.** Count your pills after picking up from the pharmacy. Recount each day to make sure no one else got them.

- **Close the lid tightly.** Make sure children and pets don't accidentally swallow the opioid. Closing the lid will also stop water or steam from entering the bottle.

- **Keep opioid medicines in a cool, dry place, away from light.** Heat, steam, water and light can make a medicine go bad. Do not put medicine in the bathroom or over the stove.



Get rid of your unused opioid medicines

Get rid of your unused opioid medicines as soon as you stop using them. This will stop kids and other adults from taking them.

Here is how to get rid of your unused opioid medicines:

- Most police stations can take your unused opioid medicines.
- Ask your pharmacist. Your pharmacist can tell you how to get rid of unused medicines.
- The instructions that come with your opioids might tell you how to get rid of them.
- Use a drug deactivation kit.
- Find a Wisconsin disposal site near you: <https://doseofrealitywi.gov/drug-takeback/find-a-take-back-location/>

Where can you get rid of unused opioid medicine in your community?



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