

Opioid Pain Medicines

Know the Risks and Tips for Safe Use

Opioids are medicines that help relieve pain. They affect your brain by blocking or reducing pain signals and interacting with its reward system. They're available legally as prescription painkillers like hydrocodone and oxycodone, and illegally as heroin.

Prescription opioids can be very addictive and dangerous if they're not used properly. Your body makes its own opioids, called endorphins. But using opioids over time can cause your body to stop making its own and become dependent on the opioids you take. This dependence causes withdrawal when you try to stop using. You can also develop tolerance to opioids over time. This means you have to keep taking larger and larger amounts of the drug to get the same feeling.

Side Effects

You can experience side effects from prescription opioids, even when you take them as directed by your doctor. Opioid painkillers can cause:

- ◆ constipation
- ◆ nausea, vomiting and dry mouth
- ◆ confusion
- ◆ depression
- ◆ fatigue and dizziness
- ◆ itching and sweating

Long-term use can lead to side effects like:

- ◆ tolerance
- ◆ dependence
- ◆ increased sensitivity to pain
- ◆ addiction
- ◆ overdose

Safe Use

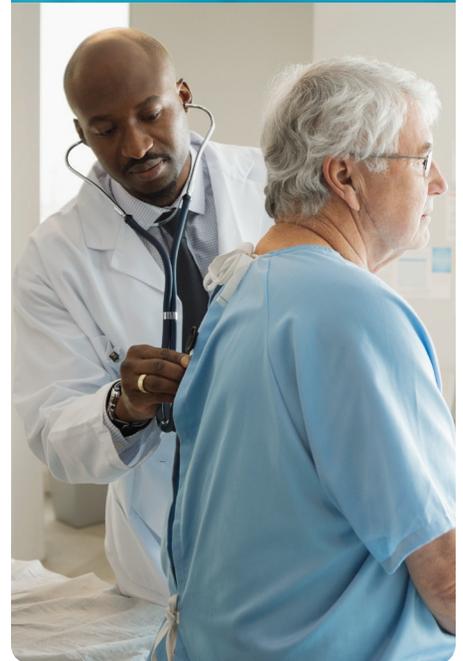
If you're prescribed an opioid painkiller during your hospital stay, be sure you know the possible risks. Talk to your doctor about safe use, and remember the following tips:

- ◆ Take opioid painkillers exactly as prescribed.
- ◆ Make a plan with your doctor that covers your questions and concerns, when you need to follow up with him or her and other ways to manage pain.
- ◆ Don't drink alcohol while you're taking opioid painkillers, and ask your doctor for a list of medicines to avoid.
- ◆ Never share your opioid painkillers, and never use another person's.
- ◆ Store your prescriptions in a secure place that others can't access.
- ◆ Throw away any leftover pills safely—to find out how, visit www.fda.gov/drugs/resourcesforyou.

If you or someone you know may be struggling with addiction, don't wait to get help. Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or visit findtreatment.samhsa.gov.

Speak Up!

If you don't want opioid pain medicine during your hospital stay, tell your doctor or nurse. You can ask a loved one to speak with hospital staff, too.



By the Numbers

- ▶ 1 in 4: The number of people on long-term prescription opioids that struggle with addiction.
- ▶ #1: Drug overdoses are now the #1 cause of death for Americans under age 50.
- ▶ Every 25 minutes: How often a baby is born with drug withdrawal. Rates have increased by 500% since 2000.