



Rx Pain Medications

KNOW THE OPTIONS • GET THE FACTS

What Are the Risks of Opioid Pain Medications?

Side Effects and Interactions

Opioids can cause unpleasant side effects such as drowsiness, constipation, and slowed breathing. Some of these effects may be increased by:

- Taking them in combination with alcohol, sedatives, or other medications;
- Taking them in high doses or more often than prescribed; or
- Taking them in a different manner than directed, like crushing pills to snort or inject.¹

In 2015, an estimated 2 million people ages 12 or older had an opioid use disorder.²

Opioid Use Disorders and Overdose

After taking certain opioids regularly for a short time, some individuals could become physically dependent and experience uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms when stopping the medication. Misusing these medications increases the risk of:

- Substance use disorders, including addiction;
- Overdose; and
- Death.^{1,3}

PROTECT YOURSELF

Talk to your health care provider

ALWAYS:

1. Tell your health care provider about all other medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medications.
2. Ask if there are nonpharmacologic treatments that may be effective, like physical therapy or non-opioid medications.
3. Avoid alcohol and illicit drugs when taking prescription pain relievers.
4. Store your medication in a safe place and dispose of unused amounts appropriately.
5. Talk to your health care provider about how to stop taking opioids safely as soon as your treatment is over, and what to do if the medication is not adequately treating your pain.
6. Use opioids only as directed by your health care provider.
7. Refrain from sharing prescriptions with friends or family—it is dangerous and illegal.
8. Talk to your health care provider about what to expect from your medications—such as whether pain will be completely eliminated or decreased.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information about overdose from opioids, visit www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose or <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Opioid-Overdose-Prevention-Toolkit-Updated-2016/SMA16-4742>.

¹ National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2014). DrugFacts: Prescription and over-the-counter medications. Retrieved from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-over-counter-medications>

² Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2016). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (HHS Publication No. SMA 16-4984, NSDUH Series H-51). Retrieved from <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FFR1-2015/NSDUH-FFR1-2015-NSDUH-FFR1-2015-NSDUH-FFR1-2015.htm>

³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). Opioids. Retrieved from <http://www.samhsa.gov/atod/opioids>

