

If You Are Prescribed Opioids, Learn How to Reduce the Risk of Addiction



Prescription opioids (like oxycodone, hydrocodone, and morphine) are chemicals that bind to receptors in your brain and body to help reduce pain. They can be effective for severe pain, but come with risks for misuse, addiction, and overdose.

Ask your doctor these questions to fully understand the risks of prescription opioids and make sure you're getting care that is safe, effective, and right for you.



1 What is opioid use disorder (opioid addiction)?

Anyone can become addicted to prescription opioids. Physical dependence, when unpleasant symptoms occur when medication is stopped (“withdrawal”), is expected after using opioids for more than a few days. Opioid use disorder (OUD), often referred to as “opioid addiction,” occurs when attempts to cut down or control opioid use are unsuccessful, or when use results in social problems and a failure to fulfill obligations at work, school, and home.

Opioids: natural or manufactured chemicals that bind to receptors in your brain and body to reduce pain. Common prescription opioids include oxycodone, hydrocodone, and morphine.

Drug Misuse: the use of prescription drugs without a prescription, or in a different way than prescribed.

Talk to your doctor about your medical and mental health history, any medications you are taking, and if you or anyone in your family has a history of substance misuse or addiction. Never take opioids in higher amounts or more often than prescribed.



Reduce the Risk of Opioid Addiction

2 What increases my risk of overdose and death?

Risk of overdose and death becomes greater when opioids are taken:

- At higher dosages
- For longer periods of time
- More often than prescribed
- Combined with benzodiazepines (also known as “benzos” and include diazepam and alprazolam), other sedatives, or alcohol
- Combined with other opioids, including illicit opioids like heroin

Talk to your doctor about any other medications you are using. Ask about the serious side effects (like excessive sleepiness or craving more of the medication) so you and your family know when to call a doctor or go to the hospital.

3 What can I expect while I am taking prescription opioids?

To help ensure safer and more effective use of opioids, your doctor may:

- Prescribe the lowest effective dose of immediate-release opioids
- Check your state’s prescription drug monitoring program information
- Conduct urine drug testing during the course of your therapy, which is increasingly becoming a routine part of care
- Prescribe naloxone, which can reverse an overdose
- Follow up within the first few days after starting a new opioid or with changing your dose
- Follow up at least every 3 months if you are on a stable dose, to ensure benefits continue to outweigh risks

Always let your doctor know about any concerns you may have about taking prescription medicines. Tell your doctor if you continue to experience pain while taking opioids to discuss other ways to reduce your pain.

If you or someone close to you needs help for a substance use disorder, talk to your doctor or call SAMHSA’s National Helpline at [1-800-662-HELP](tel:1-800-662-HELP) or go to SAMHSA’s Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator (<http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>)