

## Understanding Your Opioid Pain Medicine

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Your doctor or other healthcare provider has prescribed you a type of medicine called an Opioid. Opioids are used to relieve pain that is moderate to severe. They may be used for a short time, such as after surgery or after getting injured. They may also be used to help with long-term pain.

Opioids can be helpful if they are taken correctly and as part of a plan from your medical team. However, they can also be dangerous if used improperly.

You have the option to request that this prescription be filled at a lesser quantity. If you choose to not fill the full prescription, you will not be able to receive the rest of the prescription at a later date.

### Know the Risks and Side Effects of Opioids

- Side effects of opioids include drowsiness, difficulty with concentration, nausea, vomiting, constipation, urinary problems, impaired sexual function and itching. Contact your provider if you notice these or other side effects.
- Serious risks of opioid pain medications include overdose or even death. This risk is greater at higher doses or when mixed with certain medications (both prescription and over-the-counter), alcohol, or street drugs. The danger of overdose is also higher when restarting an opioid after being off of it for more than a few days.
- Opioids can sometimes cause addiction. Addiction can mean that you crave the medication for reasons besides pain. Some people have more risk for becoming addicted, even when opioids are used properly.
- All people who take opioids regularly will develop physical dependence. You will feel physically sick if you suddenly stop taking them. This is called withdrawal. Symptoms include feeling restless, irritable or sweaty. They also include diarrhea, bone and muscle aches, and difficulty sleeping.

### Using Your Opioids Safely

- Take medications only as prescribed.
- **Never** take more than instructed. If you find that you want to take more than prescribed, speak to your provider.
- Never take somebody else's medicine
- Never give or sell your medicine to someone else
- Don't mix opioids with alcohol or other drugs. It increases the risk of overdose.
- Taking opioids while you are also taking medicine for anxiety can cause an overdose. Talk with your provider if you are taking Klonopin, Valium, Ativan or other medicines of this type.
- Do not use opioids for something other than pain (anxiety, sleep, fear of pain, to feel good). They are not meant for this. Talk to your provider if you feel like you

- need to take them for any reasons besides the ones that they were prescribed for.
- Do not drive or operate machinery until the medicine effects are gone. Wait until you can think clearly.
  - Make sure your provider knows all of the medicines, vitamins, herbal products, and supplements you take. Taking some medicines together can cause problems.
  - Check with your provider or pharmacist before you start any new medicines. This includes over-the-counter medicines.
  - If you have been taking opioids for longer than 2 weeks, you will need to gradually decrease the dose to avoid symptoms of withdrawal. Withdrawal from opioids is not dangerous, but it can feel like a bad case of the flu and be very uncomfortable. Your provider can give you instructions for decreasing your medication.
  - Use opioids with more caution and talk with your provider if any of these apply to you:
    - You are older than 65
    - You have a history of alcohol or drug addiction
    - You have depression or had it in the past
    - You have had a prior overdose or suicide attempt
    - You are using a medication for anxiety.
    - You have a medical problem that affects your breathing, such as sleep apnea, COPD or emphysema.
  - A medication called Narcan/Naloxone can reverse an overdose when given in time. A kit can help you and even save your life, if you take too much of an opioid. Ask your provider about this medicine.

## Safe Storage of Your Opioid Medicines

- Always remember that your medications are prescribed **only** for you.
- Pain medications are a leading cause of serious poisoning of children and pets when they are not stored properly.
- Lock up or hide medications so that family members, friends, visitors or others cannot take them.
- Keep opioids in their original packaging so it is clear whose medications they are and to save the directions for correct use.

## Safe Disposal of Your Opioid Medicines

- Opioids may be harmful and even life threatening if they are taken by someone other than the person for whom the medicine was prescribed. So, if you still have some but you no longer need them, **GET RID OF THEM!**
- If you don't need to take opioids anymore but you have leftovers, the best thing to do is to give them to a "take-back" program or a DEA-authorized collector.
  - Many pharmacies and police stations have secure take-back boxes where you can get rid of your medicines.
  - To find a disposal site near you, look on this website: <https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch>
- If there is no medicine take-back program in your area, you can get rid of most medicines in the household trash. Follow these steps:
  1. Mix the medicines (do NOT crush tablets or capsules) with kitty litter or used coffee grounds. (Children, pets or other people will be less likely to eat or take

them.)

2. Place this mixture in a sealed plastic bag or empty can.

3. Throw the container in your household trash.

- Some medicines (but not all) can be flushed down the toilet. Check this FDA website to find a list of medicines that are safe to flush away:
    - <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm>
  - Before throwing out your empty pill bottle or other empty medicine packaging, remember to scratch out all information on the label to make it unreadable.
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