



# OPIOID SAFETY

How to take, store, and dispose of prescription pain medicine

Prescription opioids are used to relieve moderate to severe pain and are often prescribed following a surgery or injury. Used appropriately, opioids can be part of a safe, effective pain management regimen.



**However, ALL opioids carry serious risks of addiction, overdose, and death, especially with prolonged or unprescribed use.**



Opioid-related risks are greater if you are:

- ◆ Older age (65 years or older)
- ◆ Pregnant

Or if you have any of the following:

- ◆ Reduced kidney or liver function
- ◆ Conditions that affect breathing such as COPD, heart failure, or sleep apnea
- ◆ Mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety
- ◆ History of drug misuse, substance use disorder, or overdose

Even when taken as directed, opioids may cause the following adverse effects:

- ◆ Tolerance (requiring more medication for the same relief)
- ◆ Dependence (physical symptoms of withdrawal when a medication is stopped)
- ◆ Constipation, dry mouth, nausea, and vomiting
- ◆ Sleepiness, dizziness, memory problems, and confusion
- ◆ Itching, flushing, and sweating
- ◆ Depression, irritability, anxiety
- ◆ Sexual dysfunction
- ◆ Increased sensitivity to pain



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**Discuss questions and concerns with your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse, and make sure your healthcare providers know of any adverse effects you experience.**

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## Steps for Your Safety

Work with your primary healthcare provider to set realistic goals and expectations for pain. Create a personalized plan to manage your pain using more than just opioids.

### Never drink alcohol while taking prescription opioids.

Unless specifically advised by your health care provider, avoid combining opioids with the following medications:

- ◆ Benzodiazepines (e.g., alprazolam (Xanax®), lorazepam (Ativan®))
- ◆ Muscle relaxants (e.g., carisoprodol (Soma®), cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril®))
- ◆ Sleeping pills (e.g., zolpidem (Ambien®))
- ◆ Other opioids



Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed, and never take opioids not prescribed to you.



Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse about **naloxone** (Narcan), which can reverse the life-threatening effects of opioids in the event of an unexpected reaction or accidental ingestion.

**If you believe you may be struggling with addiction, tell your healthcare provider or call 1-800-662-HELP.**

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## Keeping Others Safe

More than half of misused prescription pain relievers are obtained from a friend or relative. Prevent accidental or intentional misuse to keep your family, friends, and community safe.

**Never share or sell prescription opioids.** Store them in a secure place out of reach of children and visitors.

Disposal options for unused medicine:

- ◆ Drug take-back days in your community
- ◆ Drug disposal drop boxes in pharmacies or law enforcement facilities
- ◆ Flush opioids down the toilet. Mix all other types of medication with an unpleasant substance (e.g., coffee grounds) to discourage retrieval and throw away in your household trash.



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