

If you have any questions, please talk with your healthcare clinician.

Taking Opioid Medication

For your health and safety, it is important to take opioid medication exactly as directed by your care team to:

- Ensure that the medication works as it should
- Lower the risk of side effects
- Lower the risk of taking too high of a dose (overdose)

Each opioid medication is different and has its own directions for use. Your healthcare team will explain what medication they prescribe for you and what you need to know.

Medication safety

Opioid medication can work well to ease pain, but taking too much, taking it too long or not taking it the right way can be harmful. Follow these safety tips to reduce the risks to your health.

Talk with your care team

- Talk with your healthcare team about your pain and how it affects your life.
- Make sure all your healthcare clinicians and pharmacies know about all the medications you take. Only 1 provider should be prescribing your pain medications.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your medications, talk with your healthcare clinicians.

Follow your prescription

- Make sure you know if you should take the medication on a regular basis or only as needed.
- If your prescription directs you to take the medication on a regular basis, take it on time and take the right dose. **If you miss a dose, do not double up on the next dose.**
- Know the right doses and how and when to take your pain medications.
- Use a medication log, app or calendar to keep track of when you take your medication. This helps you to stay on schedule and not miss doses or take extra doses.
- When taking liquid doses, use a measuring spoon or dropper to make sure you take the correct dose.
- Do not cut, crush or change your medication in any way.

Know the precautions and side effects

- Ask your healthcare team about the precautions and side effects of your pain medications.
- Ask what you can do to prevent or control side effects.
- Tell your healthcare clinician if you have any side effects.
- Do not drive while taking opioid medications.
- Do not use dangerous equipment or power tools while taking opioid medications.

Use opioid medications safely

- Do not take someone else's opioid medications and do not share yours with other people.
- Check expiration dates regularly and throw out any expired medications correctly.
- Follow your healthcare clinicians' directions for trying different medications, different ways to take them or different combinations of medications to get the best relief from pain.
- Do not wait to take your medication until the pain gets too bad.
- Do not stop taking all your pain medication at once. You may need to reduce the dose slowly. Your healthcare team will talk to you about how to do this.
- Do not run out of pain medication. Try to always have a 1-week supply. You may need written prescriptions or extra time to order certain kinds of medications. Please allow 3 business days for a refill.

Dangers of combining medications

Some medications can be dangerous when used with opioid medication. In some cases, combining medications can cause death. Tell your healthcare clinicians and pharmacist about all the medications you are taking including prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal remedies, supplements, and illegal drugs. Medications that may be unsafe to use with opioid medications include:

- Over-the-counter pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
- Benzodiazepines, such as clonazepam (Klonopin®) or alprazolam (Xanax®)
- Muscle relaxants, such as cyclobenzaprine (Amrix®) or carisoprodol (Soma®)
- Hypnotics, such as sleep aids like zolpidem (Ambien®)

Warning: Never take opioid medication with alcohol or street drugs. Opioid medication affects the part of the brain that controls breathing. An overdose of opioid medication can slow breathing down and it can stop your breathing leading to death. Call 911 right away if you think you or someone else has had an overdose.

Symptoms of an opioid overdose

Look for these 3 key symptoms:

- The dark circles in the middle of the eyes are very small (pinpoint pupils)
- Slow breathing or no breathing
- The person is not awake, aware or does not wake up (unconscious)

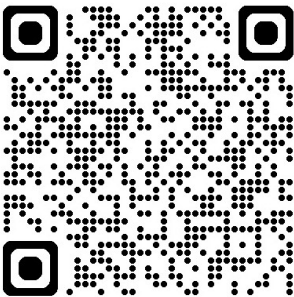
Other symptoms to look for:

- Limp body
- Pale face
- Cool, damp skin
- Purple or blue color in lips and fingernails
- Vomiting

Treatment of an opioid overdose

Naloxone (Narcan®) is a medication that that can reverse the effects of an overdose. If you suspect an opioid overdose, use naloxone right away. You can get naloxone from your healthcare team or over the counter at any pharmacy.

For information on how to use Narcan spray go to narcan.com/en/how-to-use-narcan-nasal-spray



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Stopping opioid medication

If you have been taking opioid medication for more than a few weeks, your body gets used to having it. When you stop taking the medication, you can have withdrawal symptoms. There are many symptoms of withdrawal that range from mild to severe.

Talk with your prescribing clinician about how to safely taper off or stop taking your opioid medication.

Opioid use concerns

Opioid use disorder (OUD) is a disease that affects a person's ability to manage how they use opioid medication. It is a common concern for people who must use strong pain medications to treat their pain. This fear may keep some people from getting good pain control which can affect their treatment. You can safely use pain medication to treat pain. When taking pain medication, work closely with your healthcare team and take medications only as prescribed by your provider.

Over time, some people need higher doses of medication to get pain relief. This is not OUD; it is known as tolerance. Tolerance means that your body has adjusted to the dose you have been taking so it does not work as well as it once did.

Tell your healthcare provider if you have a personal or family history of regularly misusing alcohol or drugs. This can help keep opioid use disorder (OUD) from becoming a problem.

Storing and disposing of opioid medication safely

Safely store opioid medication to help protect anyone else from accidentally taking the medication. Store medication in a cool dry place. Dispose of unused or expired opioid medication in a safe way to prevent harm to other people. Do not save your medication or give it to other people for any reason.

To find a safe drug take-back site close to you, visit: nm.org/safemeddisposal

Call the Drug Enforcement Administration Diversion Control Division at 800.882.9539 (7:30 am to 4:50 pm CT). Always call the take-back site first to confirm hours of operation.

Ask your pharmacy about a mail-back program. You may be able to send the medication through the mail by using a special envelope.

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