

Prescription opioids: What they are and their serious risks

Prescription opioids can be helpful in relieving pain after surgery or an injury. But even when taken exactly as your doctor says, opioids still come with serious risks, like addiction and overdose. It's important to know what opioid addiction looks like and how to help prevent it.

Anyone can get addicted to opioids

Many people think they are not at risk for opioid addiction (also called "opioid use disorder"). But it can happen to anyone and can lead to an overdose.

Opioids change how the brain and nervous system work. These changes may be stronger or happen faster in some people than others. There's no way to know before taking opioids how they may affect you.

Signs of opioid addiction

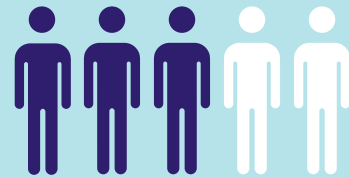
Not all people with opioid use disorder have the same symptoms. Here are some common ones to look out for:

- Craving more of the opioid, even while knowing it can cause harm
- Taking opioids more often or taking more than prescribed
- Seeking opioids from more than one doctor or pharmacy at the same time
- Having severe mood changes
- Having trouble thinking or learning
- Having trouble making decisions or solving problems
- Showing changes in how they appear, like poor hygiene or sudden weight changes
- Lying about location or activities
- Stealing money or drugs from other people
- Missing work or not doing well at work
- Not talking to friends or family for longer than normal spans of time

45 people
a day

in the United States die from
prescription opioid overdose.

More than 3 in 5 people



who died from a drug overdose had
a missed opportunity to get the care
or lifesaving actions they needed.



How to help prevent opioid addiction

- Ask your doctor about lower-risk ways to manage your pain, including:
 - Over-the-counter pain relief drugs like ibuprofen or acetaminophen
 - Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to manage stress and emotional triggers
 - Physical therapy and exercise
- If you are given opioids, ask your doctor:
 - How often should I take these?
 - How many pills are right for me?
 - What are the possible side effects?
 - How will you help me stop taking these?
- Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than your doctor said to.
- Store opioids in a safe place others can't access.
- Help prevent misuse and abuse. Do not share or sell opioids and never use someone else's opioids.
- Safely get rid of unused prescription opioids, as the FDA shares on their drug disposal page: **FDA.gov/Drugs/Disposal-Unused-Medicines-What-You-Should-Know/Drug-Disposal-Drug-Take-Back-Locations**
 - Find a drug take back site where you can drop them off.
 - Follow the FDA's advice on flushing drugs down the toilet. See which drugs you can flush and how to get rid of them here: **FDA.gov/Drugs/Disposal-Unused-Medicines-What-You-Should-Know/Drug-Disposal-FDA's-Flush-List-Certain-Medicines**

Note: If you have a question about how to dispose of unused opioids, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

How to get help

Getting better is possible. If you think you or a loved one might have opioid addiction, you can:

- Tell your doctor and ask for help.
- Call SAMHSA's National Helpline at **1.800.662.HELP (4357)** or **TTY 1.800.487.4889**.

To learn more, visit the CDC's page on opioid addiction recovery: **CDC.gov/RxAwareness/**

What to do if you see something that isn't right

If you have concerns about opioids your doctor gave you, please reach out to Prime's Special Investigations Unit (SIU). You can reach us in two ways:



Send us an email at **FraudTipHotline@PrimeTherapeutics.com**.



Call us at **800.731.3269**.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, May 6). *Overdose graphics*. CDC.gov/Overdose-Prevention/Communication-Resources/Overdose-Graphics.html