



Frequently Asked Questions About Opioids



Consumers should always feel comfortable asking their healthcare provider and pharmacist questions about prescription opioids. Below are 10 common questions patients have about their rights, risks and responsibilities associated with prescription opioids.



What is a prescription opioid?

Prescription opioids are medications prescribed by healthcare providers to treat moderate to severe pain for health conditions that cause ongoing discomfort as well as for pain following surgery or injury. Common names of prescription opioids include:

- Oxycodone
- Morphine
- Hydrocodone
- Oxymorphone
- Codeine
- Fentanyl

If you are not sure if your medicine is an opioid, check your prescription labels to look for these generic names. The National Safety Council also provides a helpful chart of medicines that contain opioids. You should always ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if you are not able to find the name or have questions. See this helpful [chart](#).



When should I take a prescription opioid?

Opioids may be prescribed to treat ongoing pain or to help you recover after a surgery or injury. Ask your healthcare provider about risks and pain treatment alternatives. Prescription opioids should only be taken when ordered by a healthcare provider and you should never take someone else's pain medication. Always follow the directions on your prescription about how many pills to take, and how often.



How can I take my prescription opioids safely?

As a patient, you always want to be as safe as possible when taking prescription opioids. Never drink alcohol while taking your prescription opioids, and only take medications prescribed to you. You should follow your healthcare provider's instructions and ask questions if you need additional information.



Can I still use prescription opioids if I am taking other medications?

Only a healthcare provider or pharmacist can provide medical advice about potential interactions with other medications. Be sure to share your current [medication list](#) before taking any prescription opioids.



What are my risks of addiction?

Addiction is always a risk when taking prescription opioids, but following instructions from your healthcare provider and letting them know if you have any side effects or signs of addiction can reduce the risks. You should watch out for risk factors associated with prescription opioids, including:

- Using opioids with other medications, drugs or alcohol
- Taking more than prescribed
- Taking a high daily dose of opioids
- Certain conditions such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, HIV, sleep apnea, or liver or lung disease
- Pregnancy
- Older age
- Family history of substance abuse



Are there alternatives to prescription opioids I should consider?

Alternatives to prescription opioids may be available, depending on your medical condition and situation. For example, physical therapy is often prescribed to patients experiencing nerve pain, and staying active can relieve lower-back pain. Always consult with your healthcare provider about the best treatment plan for your health. Check out "[Choosing Wisely](#)," a health education resource for helping patients talk to their doctors, which offers ideas for other treatments for chronic pain.



How do I navigate my health insurance to discuss coverage options for alternative pain management options?

Many health insurance plans cover alternative pain management options, but you should always consult with them to find providers in your network to avoid or limit your out-of-pocket costs. Calling the phone number on the back of your insurance card is generally the best first step to determining if you need any additional documentation from your healthcare provider. The American Physical Therapy Association, an AAOA partner, provides [answers](#) to common questions pertaining to coverage for physical therapy services.



What level of pain is normal after a surgical procedure?

Pain after surgery is to be expected. It is actually part of the body's normal response to a surgical intervention. Pain should be controlled to the correct level so that a patient can function. Every patient reacts to surgery differently, so always ask your healthcare provider what to expect — and when you should seek help if the pain intensifies. Learn more about pain management after surgery through the video, "[Managing Pain After Surgery: What You Need to Know.](#)"



If I do not think I will need all the opioids prescribed to me, should I still fill the prescription?

When opioids are prescribed to you, you may be able to ask your pharmacist to dispense fewer pills than your prescription allows. This is called a partial fill, and you can always fill the remainder of the prescription later if you still need it. A partial fill is a responsible way of limiting the amount of opioids in your home to what you will actually need. Your pharmacist can let you know if your state allows this option. If you feel that you will not need the prescription to manage your pain, you can let your healthcare provider know and you may not need to pick up the medication at all.



What should I do if I am concerned that a friend or family member may be misusing or abusing prescription opioids?

When a loved one is dealing with substance use disorder, it can be challenging for the entire family. Resources are available to help you recognize the signs of addiction and point your friend or family member to the appropriate assistance. If you or someone close to you has an addiction to pain medication, talk to your healthcare provider or contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's treatment helpline at **1-800-662-HELP**.