



What You Should Know About Opioids



Knowing the rights, risks and responsibilities of prescription opioid use is an important first step to addressing the opioid epidemic. Whether you are taking medication to treat pain, or have friends or family members who have been prescribed opioids, knowing the facts can help prevent misuse before it occurs.

For all consumers...

- 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 prescription opioids include:
 - Oxycodone
 - Hydrocodone
 - Codeine
 - Morphine
 - Oxymorphone
 - Fentanyl
- If you are not sure if your medicine is an opioid, check your prescription labels to look for 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.

Watch for risk factors associated with prescription opioids, including:

- Mixing opioids with other medications, drugs, nutritional supplements 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

Let your doctor know if you or your loved ones have any of these risk factors before filling any opioid prescription. It is important to understand the risks and you may want to discuss possible alternatives for treating pain.

- Opioid misuse often starts in the home, so safe storage and disposal are key to prevention. Make sure that prescription opioids are stored securely and remember to properly dispose of all unused prescription opioids as soon as possible. AAOA offers a safe disposal locator for you to find a place to safely get rid of your unused medications. Find details on safe disposal options [here](#).

If you are a parent...

- Preventing misuse and abuse of prescription opioids among adolescents begins with the safe use by parents. Teens are more likely to misuse prescription opioids if their parents do.¹
- Always monitor what your child's doctor is prescribing and ask if the medication is an opioid. If a dental procedure or surgery is planned, ask your healthcare provider for alternatives to opioids, and to limit the amount of the prescription to only an amount that might be needed.
- Safely storing and disposing of prescription opioids can reduce the opportunities for children to access these medicines. Nearly 13 percent of high school seniors have used prescription opioids for non-medical purposes.² Seven out of 10 teens who used prescription opioids for non-medical reasons reported combining prescription opioids with other substances, such as marijuana, alcohol, cocaine and amphetamines.³

If you are a student athlete...

- Student athletes are at an increased risk of prescription opioid abuse. Athletes should rest and heal after an injury and not rely on prescription opioids to get them back into action sooner than they have been advised.⁴

If you are pregnant...

- Taking opioids during pregnancy may cause a newborn baby to have withdrawal symptoms for a few days or weeks. A healthcare provider can help identify these symptoms and recommend steps, such as swaddling and breastfeeding, to provide relief for the child.⁵

If you are a senior or taking care of a senior...

- Seniors often experience higher rates of chronic pain or have reason to undergo surgery. It is best to be ready for conversations about prescription opioids by keeping a **list of all medications** that you currently take and sharing it with your healthcare provider. Some medicines should not be taken together, so always ask your healthcare provider if opioids will interfere with your current medications in any way.⁶
- Always let a healthcare provider know about any unusual behaviors or reactions to prescription opioid use experienced by you or a loved one. The impact of prescription opioid misuse and abuse among seniors is significant. In 2015, there were 125,000 hospitalizations and more than 36,000 emergency department visits among older adults as a result of opioid-related diagnoses.⁷

For more resources and videos that can help you prevent the abuse and misuse of prescription opioids, visit www.AgainstOpioidAbuse.org.

1 <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2019/02/25/opioids022519>
2 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22566521>
3 <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/infographics/teens-mix-prescrip2>
4 <https://www.justthinktwice.gov/facts/preventing-opioid-misuse-among-high-school-student-athletes-playbook-students>

5 <https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Opioid-Use-Disorder-and-Pregnancy>
6 https://meps.ahrq.gov/data_files/publications/st515/stat515.shtml
7 <https://www.hcup-us.ahrq.gov/reports/statbriefs/sb244-Opioid-Inpatient-Stays-ED-Visits-Older-Adults.jsp>