

## OPIOIDS

# You May Be at Risk For a Fall

If you are taking one of these opioids for pain

### Hydrocodone

- Vicodin
- Lortab
- Norco
- Hysingla ER

### Oxycodone

- Percocet
- Endocet
- OxyContin
- Roxicodone
- Xtrampza ER
- Ozaydo
- RoxyBond

### Morphine

- MS Contin
- Kadian

### Codeine

- Tylenol with Codeine #3
- Tylenol with Codeine #4

### Tramadol

- Ultram
- ConZip

### Fentanyl

- Duragesic

### Hydromorphone

- Dilaudid

### Methadone

- Methadose

### Meperidine

- Demerol

### Buprenorphine

- Butrans



## Did you know?

Opioid medications are typically used for pain management. Methadone and buprenorphine are often used for treatment of opioid use disorder. In these circumstances it is important to continue the treatment as prescribed and discuss with your healthcare professional about other ways you may prevent a fall.

### Test your knowledge about opioid medications

	TRUE	FALSE
1. Opioid medications are safe to take over a long period of time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. An overdose can happen, even when taking the opioid medication as prescribed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Higher doses of opioid medication are riskier than lower doses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Only opioids can relieve chronic pain.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Answers

**1 FALSE: Opioid medications are safe to take over a long period of time.**

Opioid medications can lead to dependence and addiction, even when used for a short time. Long-term use may cause problems with memory, balance, sleep, depression, and increased sensitivity to pain.

For older people who take opioids:

- 4 in 10 will have constipation.
- 1 in 4 will have trouble breathing during sleep.
- Risk of fracture is 4 times higher than people taking other pain relievers.

**2 TRUE: An overdose can happen, even when taking the opioid medication as prescribed.**

You can accidentally overdose with small amounts of opioid medication even when you take it as prescribed

- An overdose can happen because as you age, opioids will remain in your body for longer periods of time. This happens because our liver and kidneys take more time to remove medications from our bodies. This means a dose that was once safe may start causing side effects.
- Overdose can also happen because of interactions between opioids and other medications or with alcohol.

**3 TRUE: Higher doses of opioid medication are riskier than lower doses.**

Higher doses of opioids increase your risk of overdose. However, the risk of overdose begins with even small doses. Higher doses typically do not lead to increases in physical activity or relieve chronic pain. In fact, sometimes higher doses have the opposite effect by making pain worse over time.

**4 FALSE: Only opioids can relieve chronic pain.**

There are other options that may help manage your pain. Discuss with your doctor safer treatment options to manage your chronic pain and improve your ability to accomplish your daily activities.



## Did you know?

- ▶ Acute and chronic pain should be treated differently.
- ▶ **Acute or short-term pain** is your body's way of warning you of injuries such as broken bones or surgery. As you heal, the pain goes away. Many treatments including opioids or other medications can help with this pain.
- ▶ **Chronic pain** lasts for months or years. It has many causes. Non-opioid treatments can be helpful with this type of pain and have less serious health risks than opioids.
- ▶ Opioids can be addictive and cause many side effects. Do not take opioids at the same time as alcohol, sleeping pills, antihistamines, or other medications that cause drowsiness.
- ▶ Opioids may make you drowsy, dizzy, or confused, which can lead to injuries.

**Even if you are NOT experiencing side effects, talk with your doctor or pharmacist about safer treatment options.**



### So ask yourself

	YES	NO
• Have you wanted to or have previously tried to cut down or stop using your medication without success?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you often have constipation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you ever have problems with your memory or your balance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**If you answered “yes” to any question, talk to your doctor about stopping your medicine, gradually reducing your dose, and other treatment options for managing your pain.**

## Gradually reducing your dose

**Do not reduce your dose without your doctor's supervision.**

See your doctor to develop a personalized plan that's right for you.

## Want to learn more?

We've enclosed some information with resources on how to manage pain. This information can help you choose a safer alternative.



## Did you know?

It is important to keep your opioid medications safely stored away and out of reach of children and have naloxone available in case of an emergency.

## Important Information

### How will my doctor reduce my opioid dose?

Together, you will make a safe plan for you. Everyone is on a different dose of opioids. Gradually reducing your dose of opioids requires an individualized plan.

Your doctor can work with you to find an effective plan to manage your pain while safely and slowly reducing your opioid dose over time.

### If I gradually decrease my opioid dose, will my pain get worse?

Most people feel better after they work with their medical provider to taper their opioid dose.

Over time, opioids stop helping with pain. They may cause side effects and when these stop, you may feel better.

If you need to take an opioid medication, work with your doctor to determine the lowest dose for as short a time as possible. Then, with your doctor's help, gradually reduce your dose.

## Alternatives for opioids to manage chronic pain

### There are other solutions to deal with your chronic pain:

Using several may help.

#### Self-care

- Get 7-8 hours of sleep most nights
- Eat a balanced diet with fruits and vegetables
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Incorporate physical exercise to your daily routine to increase your strength, flexibility, and endurance

Your body may not tolerate your previous higher dose of an opioid once you start reducing how much you take. **You could overdose if you quickly go back to high doses of opioids.** Always take opioids as prescribed.

#### WITHDRAWAL SIDE EFFECTS

You may have trouble sleeping (insomnia) anxiety, nausea, or other reactions if you reduce your opioid dose too quickly.

**Talk to your doctor about ways to manage side effects so they do not become serious.**

#### WARNING

**Do not cut slow-release tablets in half.** Cutting some opioid pills in half can increase your risk of overdosing.

#### Resources

Go4Life exercise program. Free videos and an "Exercise & Physical Activity" guide: [www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-and-physical-activity](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-and-physical-activity)

CDC webpage on Safely and Effectively Managing Pain Without Opioids: <https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/hcp/clinical-care/oud-pain-management.html>

## Improving pain management skills

- Taking a multidisciplinary approach can help with pain relief by addressing multiple factors of the condition. Your doctor can help you coordinate the treatments from multiple therapies.
- Talk to a therapist about a self-management program for pain. A self-management program can help you take control of how you deal with pain.
- Speak to a therapist about cognitive behavioral therapies or mindfulness-based interventions for pain. These therapies change the way you think about pain so that your body and mind react better when you experience pain.

## Medications, procedures, and devices, and activities

- Try topical pain medications, capsaicin, or lidocaine patches that you can apply to the area with pain.
- Ask your doctor about other oral medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil).
- Talk to your doctor about TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation). Healthcare professional use TENS to treat a range of conditions, including hand or knee osteoarthritis, tendinitis, and fibromyalgia.
- Depending on your diagnosis, physical therapy or massage therapy might help the pain you are experiencing. Some physical activities such as yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates, and other structured exercise programs also have benefits for dealing with pain.
- Acupuncture may relieve pain and discomfort from a variety of conditions. Ask your doctor if acupuncture might help you.



### WARNING

If you are taking methadone or buprenorphine as part of an opioid use disorder treatment, stopping these medications can increase risk of a relapse.

## Mrs C's Story

**In 2010, at the age of 63, Mrs. C was in a car crash that left her in terrible pain for years. To manage her pain, her doctors put her on powerful opioid medications.**

### **When did you realize you had a problem with opioids?**

“In 2015, years after my crash, I was concerned about the lasting side effects of the medications I am taking and decided not to take anymore for that day. The medication started to wear off, and I started feeling very shaky and sweaty and experiencing diarrhea. I felt so terrible that I relented and took my dose.”

### **What did your doctor say?**

“My doctor agreed that we can reconsider the use of my opioids but was also concerned about abruptly stopping them. My doctor explained to me that stopping medications abruptly increases risk of withdrawal and other side effects. But there was a safe way to slowly lower the dose to stop the medication.”

### **How are you now?**

“Much better. I have my life back. I don't take anything. I have occasional soreness, but I'd rather be sore than dependent on opioids. I use physical therapy, massage therapy, and other treatments.”

## Tapering-off program

Following a schedule directed by your doctor or pharmacist to slowly lower your opioid, also called tapering, can help reduce the risk of withdrawal symptoms.

Tapering schedules often take longer than five weeks and you may need to use multiple copies of this page for a full taper. A typical tapering schedule for opioids can take several months to years.

**You will receive your individualized tapering program using the chart below:**

TAPER SCHEDULE								
Week	Time of day	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							

Please consult your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before stopping any medication.

