

Prescription Opioids: Frequently Asked Questions

Opioids are chemicals that help to manage pain. Commonly prescribed opioids include codeine, fentanyl, methadone, morphine, oxycodone, oxymorphone and hydrocodone. Here are the answers to some frequently asked questions you may have about these powerful medicines.

When are opioids most helpful?

The use of opioids is best reserved for severe, acute pain — not chronic pain — and should generally be used for no more than seven days. **Acute pain** is pain that usually starts suddenly and subsides as your body heals, like after surgery. **Chronic pain** usually lasts three months or more. It can be caused by injury, disease or inflammation.

Does everyone who uses prescription opioids become addicted?

No, but it's always a possibility, so caution is advised. Discuss non-opioid medication options with your doctor, especially if you or anyone in your family has struggled with addiction to medicines or alcohol.

How can you prevent addiction while taking opioid painkillers?

- Discuss with your doctor how long you'll need to take opioids, and have a plan to transition to non-opioid painkillers as your pain becomes less severe.
- Follow up regularly with your doctor.
- Never take a higher dose or more frequent doses than what is prescribed. Make sure that your doctor and pharmacist are aware of any other medicines you are taking.
- Never combine opioids with alcohol.

Are there dangers to prescription opioids besides addiction?

Yes. If you repeatedly take opioids, you may develop a tolerance to the medicine. That means that over time you might need higher doses to effectively relieve your pain, putting you at risk for an overdose. You may also develop physical dependence on the medicine. That means you might experience withdrawal symptoms once you stop taking the medication. This is why it's important to work with your doctor and take an opioid for the minimum time necessary.

What if I become addicted?

First, know that addiction is an illness and NOT a moral failing.

Help is available. Call Horizon Behavioral HealthSM at **1-800-626-2212** to:

- Find an in-network behavioral health professional or treatment facility
- Get urgent access to needed care
- Coordinate with your other health care professionals
- Get follow-up care and support to maintain treatment
- Understand your coverage and help you maximize your benefit

[HorizonBlue.com/gethealthy](https://www.horizonblue.com/gethealthy)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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