



Opioid Pain Medication Fact Sheet

Why did I receive this pamphlet?

You are getting this information because you have been prescribed an opioid which is a strong medicine used to help relieve severe pain. However, opioids do have risks that you should know about.

Make sure to ask your health care provider about the risks of taking opioids in conjunction with the use of alcohol and any other medicines you may be taking, such as over-the-counter medications, vitamins, or herbal supplements.

What are the risks of using opioids?

Opioids can cause lack of energy, inability to concentrate, weakness, nausea, vomiting, and trouble breathing.

Only take this medicine exactly as instructed. Contact your health care provider if you feel very sleepy, dizzy, if you pass out while taking the opioid, or if your pain does not improve after starting treatment.

People taking opioids can become physically dependent on them, meaning you may feel sick with withdrawal symptoms if you stop taking the medicine quickly. Withdrawal symptoms include fever, chills, cough, body aches, stomach upset, diarrhea, and headache. The time it takes to become physically dependent varies from person to person but can occur in just a few days. To prevent withdrawal, your health care provider will guide you on how to take less medicine over time when you no longer need it.

Overdose can happen when:

- taking more opioids than prescribed
- you are also taking medications that cause sleepiness such as benzodiazepines (which include Valium®, Xanax®, Ativan®, and Klonopin®)
- if you are also drinking alcohol.

Even when the opioids are taken as prescribed, overdoses can happen when taking these medications and/or alcohol at the same time or even just on the same day as opioids.

If you feel that you are struggling to control your use of opioids, or if you feel that they are making you worse rather than better, reach out to your health care provider.

What is naloxone (Narcan®) and how is it used?

When you take more opioid medication than your body can handle, it can slow your breathing and in some cases cause overdose and/or death. Naloxone can correct the slow breathing and sleepiness caused by opioids and bring back breathing within minutes. It can be given as a nasal spray (sprayed into the nose) or a muscular injection (shot). For people taking opioid medications, it is recommended to keep naloxone in your home. **Naloxone is available at many stores and pharmacies without a prescription.**

After receiving naloxone, it might take some time for a person to feel awake and aware again. It is safest to call 911 and seek emergency care, even if the person responds to naloxone, to be sure there is not another health problem. It is best to stay with the person until help arrives. **Make a plan for how you will keep yourself safe from overdose.**

How can I safely use, store, and dispose of opioid medications?

USE: Take only as directed by your health care provider. Do not share your medication with anyone, even if their symptoms are the same. Sharing your opioid prescription with another person is illegal and could seriously harm them.

STORE: Store opioids safely, such as in a locked medicine cabinet or a lock box where others, especially children, cannot get to it.

GET RID OF (dispose): Having unused opioid medication at home makes it more likely for children to accidentally poison themselves and/or overdose.



Unused prescriptions should be thrown out in a prescription drug drop box, located in many communities, scan to find a drop box near you.



For information about safe disposal of medication.

How can I treat my pain with non-opioid medication alternatives?

There are medications to treat pain that do not include opioids and do not cause you to become addicted and/or overdose. These medications include aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol®), and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen and naproxen. Some prescription medications that treat other problems like seizures or depression can also treat pain. You may want to talk about these options with your health care provider.

How can I manage my pain without medication?

Acute pain (short-term pain lasting less than 3 months)	Chronic pain (long-term pain lasting more than 3 months)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ice• Heat• Keeping injury raised• Rest• Not moving the injured area (sometimes with a brace or cast)• Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical Therapy (PT)• Acupuncture• Massage• Exercise (such as aerobic, aquatic, and/or resistance exercise)• Mind-body practices (such as yoga, tai chi, and qigong)• Psychological therapies (such as cognitive behavioral therapy)• Mindfulness-based stress reduction• Weight loss• Interventional procedures (such as steroid injections, nerve blocks)

Advantages and disadvantages of alternative treatment options	Advantages	Disadvantages
Non-opioid medications	Lower risk of addiction, works for many pain types	Some may have side effects (NSAIDs can cause stomach pain and bleeding or kidney damage or high blood pressure)
Physical & healing exercises (rehabilitation therapies)	Addresses the pain where it is coming from, improves ability to move around	Need a provider to send you to a physical therapist or chiropractor (referral). Must have time for many appointments
Mental health treatments	Helps manage how the body feels pain and mental health	Need a provider to send you to a person who focuses on mental health such as a psychologist. May not treat the pain right away
Medical treatments	Can stop the pain for long time	Need a provider to send you to a pain specialist (referral). Some might include small surgery (nerve block) or injections (steroid shot)
Acupuncture	Can make people with a variety of diseases and conditions feel better	May need a provider to send you (referral) or may not be covered by private insurance
Yoga	Can make people with a variety of diseases and conditions feel better	Must have time and money for regular practice. Not available in all areas

How can I fill my opioid prescription in a lesser quantity?

Patients have the legal right to request their opioid prescription be only partly filled by the pharmacy. This means they can choose to receive a smaller amount than prescribed.

Misuse of prescription drugs among youth

Young people aged 12 or older who use opioids that were not prescribed for them often get them from a friend, relative, or the internet. Model safe actions by knowing what you are taking, taking it only as prescribed, and getting rid of extra medication when you are finished taking it. Talk to your children about how dangerous prescription drugs can be and be clear that they should not use anyone else's medications.

Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline

The helpline is a statewide service to help you find substance use support, including harm reduction, treatment, recovery, and even problem gambling services. Helpline services are free and private, and available 24/7.



Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline

Toll Free: 800-327-5050

Text: "HOPE" to 800237

[HelpLineMA.org](https://www.HelpLineMA.org)



You can reverse an overdose

Review the information on the [You Can website](#) for further information about how to reverse an overdose. This website includes helpful information about how to recognize the symptoms of an overdose, how to use naloxone to reverse an overdose and what you can do to help someone suffering from an overdose if naloxone is not available.



SafeSpot

The [SafeSpot website](#) includes a hotline to call if you need in-person support to help someone suffering from an overdose.

Addiction Support and Treatment Resources

For Youth and Young Adults (up to age 25):

Youth Central Intake & Care Coordination:

Toll Free: 866-705-2807 / 617-661-3991

TTY: 617-661-9051

[HealthRecovery.org](https://www.HealthRecovery.org)

Other ways to access treatment:

- Talk with your health care provider
- Contact your health insurance company
- Check if your employer offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which can provide confidential support to employees to help them deal with personal and work-related issues such as substance addiction treatment