

Information for Patients

Opioids: What You Need To Know

Prescription opioids (*Percocet, Norco, Morphine, Oxycodone, Dilaudid, etc.*) can be used to help relieve medium to severe pain and are often prescribed following a surgery, injury, and other reasons. These medications can be an important part of treatment but also come with serious risks of addiction and overdose, especially with long-term use.

Opioid Side Effects

- Constipation
- Sleepiness, dizziness
- Itching and sweating
- Nausea, vomiting
- Confusion

Tapering Your Opioid Pain Medication

If you will be taking opioid pain medications for a short time after surgery or other reason, your goal is to take only the amount you need to manage your pain to do your recovery activities, like walking, sleeping well, etc.

As your pain gets better, decrease your opioid pain pills by:

- **Step 1: Take fewer opioid pain pills**
 - Example: If you are taking 2 pills at a time, try decreasing to 1 pill. If your pain is managed, continue taking 1 pill for the next 1-2 days. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you can break the pills in half to decrease the amount.
- **Step 2: Increase the time between opioid pain pills**
 - Example: If you are taking pain pill(s) every 4 hours, try taking pills every 6 hours for 1-2 days. Then try taking pills every 8 hours for 1-2 days. Then try stopping.
- **Step 3: Safely get rid of opioids you no longer need:** Do not throw pills in the trash or flush down the toilet. Ask your pharmacy where you can turn in opioids or visit www.med-project.org which will have medication disposal locations.



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Recommendations for Safe Opioid Pain Medication Use

- **Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed.**
- **Help prevent misuse and abuse.** Never sell or share prescription pain medication, or use another person's prescription pain medication.
- **Store prescription opioids in a secure place** out of reach of others, including children, visitors, friends, and family.
- **If you need help with addiction,** tell your doctor or call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP.

Other Pain Management Options

- Ask your health care provider about non-opioid pain medication options.
- Comfort items: Massage, aromatherapy, music, distraction (*watching movies, reading, doing hobbies, etc.*).
- Heat or cold packs if ok by your health care provider.
- Don't sit down or sit too long. Getting up and walking keeps you from getting stiff.

Constipation Management

A very common side effect of taking opioids is constipation. Follow the recommendations below to help prevent constipation, unless advised otherwise by your health care provider. These medications are available over the counter at drug stores and are ok to take if breastfeeding. *Stop taking them if you develop loose or watery stools.*

Every day that you are taking opioid pain medication:

- **Take Docusate** (generic for Colace®) stool softener, 100 mg, twice a day. Takes 12-72 hours to work.
- **Take Senna** (generic for Senokot®) laxative, 8.6mg, 2 tablets at bedtime. OR drink Senna tea (generic for Smooth Move Tea®, etc.), 1 cup at bedtime. Takes 6-12 hours to work.



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