

Opioid Information

Prescription opioids can be used to help relieve moderate-to-severe pain and are often prescribed following a surgery or injury, or for certain health conditions. These medications can be an important part of treatment but also come with serious risks.

What Are the Risks and Side Effects of Opioid Use?

Prescription opioids carry serious risks of addiction and overdose, especially with prolonged use. An opioid overdose, often marked by slowed breathing, can cause sudden death. The use of prescription opioids can have a number of side effects as well, even when taken as directed:

- Tolerance—the need to take more of a medication for the same pain relief/affect
- Physical dependence—the body has a reaction when no longer taking the medication that can cause withdrawal symptoms
- Increased sensitivity to pain
- Constipation
- Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth
- Sleepiness and dizziness
- Confusion
- Depression
- Low levels of testosterone that can result in lower sex drive, energy, and strength
- Itching and sweating

These Risks Are Greater With:

- History of drug misuse, substance use disorder, or overdose
- Mental health conditions (such as depression or anxiety)
- Sleep apnea
- Age 65 years or older
- Pregnancy

Avoid alcohol while taking prescription opioids. Also, unless specifically advised by your health care provider, medications to avoid include:

- Benzodiazepines (such as Xanax or Valium)
- Muscle relaxants (such as Soma or Flexeril)
- Hypnotics (such as Ambien or Lunesta)
- Other prescription opioids

If You Are Prescribed Opioids for Pain:

- Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed.
- Follow up with your primary health care provider at scheduled intervals.

- Work with your provider to create a plan on how to manage your pain, including discussing alternative pain management options.
- Talk to your provider about any and all concerns and side effects.
- Never sell or share prescription opioids.
- Never use another person's prescription opioids.
- Store prescription opioids in a secure place and out of reach of others (this may include visitors, children, friends, and family).
- Safely dispose of unused prescription opioids: Find your community drug take-back program or your pharmacy mail-back program, or flush them down the toilet, following guidance from the Food and Drug Administration (www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou).
- Visit www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose to learn about the risks of opioid abuse and overdose.
- If you believe you may be struggling with a substance use disorder, speak to your CMH treatment team for co-occurring treatment services they can offer or other referral options.