



Opioid Awareness


From movies to news reports, opioid use and deaths have been top of many minds over the last few years. For example, in 2022, there were 82,998 opioid-involved drug overdose deaths in the United States, an increase from 82,310 in the previous year. Let's dive into the topic.

WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are strong medications often prescribed for pain. Side effects include drowsiness, stomach issues, and confusion. Common brands of opioid painkillers are Vicodin, Percocet and Oxycontin. You may also see these in generic forms such as Oxycodone or Hydrocodone with Acetaminophen.

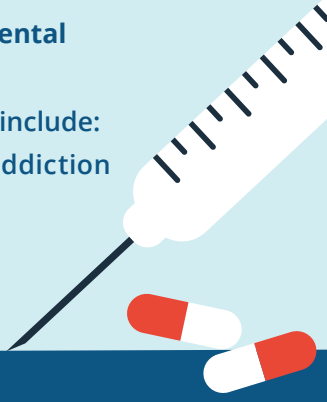
If you take these medicines for an extended time, your body can feel less of their effect, causing some to want to use more of the drug to feel results and thus become addicted. This can lead to more side effects, overdose, or addiction.

Some of the signs that you or someone you know could be on the path to addiction include:

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- » Thinking about taking more medicine than currently prescribed
 - » Using painkillers when no longer needed for pain
 - » Accessing more painkiller medication from another source beside your physician
 - » Taking pain medicine not as prescribed (crushing, chewing, snorting, or injecting)

If any of these sound familiar, talk to your doctor or call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Helpline at 800-662-4357.

Some of the factors that increase the risk of addiction include:

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- » Personal or family history of substance abuse/addiction
 - » Depression and anxiety
 - » Long-term use of opioids

OVERDOSE ACTIONS

If addiction is present, be aware of the signs of an overdose: troubled breathing, sleepiness or stupor, weak muscles, cold and clammy skin, pinpoint pupils, slow heart rate, and dangerously low blood pressure. If these symptoms occur, call 911. Then, move the person onto their side with their head supported by their hand (to open the airway) and knees out (to prevent rolling onto stomach). Consider also having Naloxone (sometimes known by its brand name Narcan) on hand. This nasal spray medication is available over the counter in most states to treat the effects of an overdose until help arrives.

HOW CAN YOU HELP PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS?

- ✓ **Safe storage:** Keep your medication in a safe place away from children, pets or visitors. Consider installing a lock on your medicine cabinet — protect your opioids as you would a weapon.
- ✓ **Safe and timely disposal:** Only use medications for as long as directed, then promptly dispose of them at your local pharmacy or at another site near you.
- ✓ **Don't mix:** Using these medicines along with alcohol, sleeping pills or anxiety medications? Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about potential negative drug interactions.
- ✓ **Don't share:** When someone you love is in pain, you want to help. But sharing your opioids is illegal and dangerous. Keep an inventory of your medications so you'll know if any have been taken.