

# What You Need to Know About Opioid Prescription Medications



Prescription opioids can be used to help relieve moderate-to-severe pain and are often prescribed following a surgery or injury as well as for certain health conditions. These medications can be an important part of treatment but also come with serious risks unless used properly. It is important to work with your health care provider to make sure you are getting the safest, most effective care.

**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 several side effects as well, even when taken as directed.

Side Effects	
Tolerance (as your body adapts to a medication, you may need to take more of a medication in order to get the same pain relief)	Physical dependence (you have symptoms of withdrawal once the medication is stopped)
Decreased levels of testosterone which can result in lower sex drive, energy and strength	Constipation (a common side effect from certain opioids being taken over a prolonged period of time)
Fatigue	Nausea, vomiting and dry mouth
Sleepiness and dizziness	Confusion
Depression	Itching and sweating
Increased sensitivity to pain	

Risks are much greater with:	
History of drug misuse, substance use disorder, or overdose	Mental health conditions (such as depression or anxiety)
Sleep apnea	Older age (65 years or older)
Pregnancy	

## Alcohol & Medications

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

Medications to avoid:	
Benzodiazepines (such as Xanax or Valium)	Muscle relaxants (such as Soma or Flexeril)
Hypnotics (such as Ambien or Lunesta)	Other prescription opioids

## Know your Options When it Comes to Pain Management

Talk to your health care provider about ways to manage your pain that don't involve prescription opioids. Some of these options **may actually work better** and have fewer risks and side effects.

Pain Management Options	
Pain relievers such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and naproxen	Cognitive behavioral therapy, a psychological, goal-directed approach, in which patients learn how to modify physical, behavioral, and emotional triggers of pain and stress
Some medications that are used for depression or seizures	Complementary therapies such as massage, acupuncture, yoga, Tai Chi, or meditation may be helpful
Physical therapy and exercise under the supervision of your health care provider	Use resources from the library, support groups and pain organizations to help you gain a better understanding of pain management

### If you are prescribed opioids for pain:

- **Be Informed:** Make sure you know the name of your medication, how much and how often to take it, and potential risks and side effects
- **Talk** to your health care provider about naloxone:
  - It can be prescribed by a clinician
  - You can pick it up at the pharmacy (using the standing order signed by Pennsylvania Department of Health's Acting Physician General, Denise Johnson)
  - It can be mailed to your home for free by using the Mail-to-Home Naloxone Program – scan the QR code to access the program
- **Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed**
- **Follow up** with the prescribing health care provider within 1 to 4 weeks
  - Work together to create a plan on how to manage your pain
  - Talk about ways to help manage your pain that don't involve prescription opioids
  - Talk about any and all concerns and side effects
- **Help prevent misuse and abuse**
  - Never sell or share prescription opioids
  - Never use another person's prescription opioids
- **Store prescription opioids in a secure place such as a lock box (not a medicine cabinet) 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 by scanning this QR code



Access Mail-to-Home Naloxone Program



Find a location near you to safely dispose of unused medication

## When to Take Over-the-Counter Pain Relievers:

	Acetaminophen	Aspirin**	Ibuprophen/Naproxen*	Excedrin**
Arthritis		X	X	
Fever	X	X	X	
Headache	X	X		X
Heart attack prevention		X		
Sinusitis			X	
Sore muscles			X	
Sore throat	X			
Toothache			X	

\* Not for dialysis patients

\*\* If you have kidney disease, consult your nephrologist before taking

## Get Help Now

- If somebody has taken drugs and becomes unresponsive, call 911 immediately.
- 24/7 help is available for anyone battling substance use disorder. Call the **Get Help Now Hotline** at 1-800-662-4357, text 717-216-0905, or visit [ddap.pa.gov](http://ddap.pa.gov) for treatment information.
- [Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](https://www.cdc.gov) to learn about the risks of opioid abuse and overdose.



Find drug and/or alcohol treatment in PA



Learn more about drug overdose