



Opioid Pain Relievers: What You Need to Know

1. What are opioid pain relievers?

- Opioid pain relievers (opioids) are medications that reduce pain.
- They can cause drowsiness, constipation, dry mouth and nausea.
- If you take more than prescribed or use in ways other than prescribed, opioids can slow your breathing and even lead to death.

2. What are the risks?

- In addition to helping pain, opioids can make you feel “high.” This feeling can make it harder to control use.
- They can lead to a fatal overdose. An overdose is more likely if you combine opioids with alcohol or other drugs such as Xanax, Ativan or Valium.
- Opioids can slow reaction time, which can increase the risk of accidents.
- If you use opioid pain relievers regularly, you could have withdrawal symptoms when you stop, such as anxiety, muscle and bone pain, diarrhea, vomiting or restless sleep.

3. How can you protect yourself and others?

- Ask your health care provider if it’s safe to take opioid pain relievers with other medication.
- Don’t drink alcohol if you’re taking opioid pain relievers.
- Fill all of your prescriptions at the same pharmacy.
- Keep your medication in a secure place, preferably locked.
- Take your medication exactly as prescribed.
- Be extra careful when driving or operating heavy machinery.
- Never share your medication or take medication prescribed for someone else.
- Flush unused medication down the toilet.
- If someone taking opioids is drowsy and breathing slowly, or can’t wake up, call 911 right away.

4. What are the signs of a problem?

- You could have a problem with opioid pain relievers if you:
 - are taking more than prescribed
 - have trouble controlling your use
 - take amounts that make you confused or sleepy

Problem with opioid pain relievers? Help is available. Speak with a health care professional or call 800-LIFENET.