

Controlling your pain with opioids, at home



Opioids are pain medications that are prescribed by your doctor when other pain medications are not effective. Opioids can also cause a feeling of euphoria (a “high”), which increases the risk of addiction and overdose.

Opioid drugs can be prescribed in different forms:

- codeine
- fentanyl
- morphine
- oxycodone
- hydromorphone

When to take an opioid medication

If you have been prescribed an opioid medication:

- you should take it **only** as prescribed
- you should **never** give or share it with anyone
- you should **never** take it with alcohol
- you should **never** take it with other drugs (unless recommended by your doctor)

Short-term effects of opioids

Short-term side effects associated with the use of opioids include:

- drowsiness
- constipation
- erectile problems
- nausea and vomiting
- a feeling of euphoria (a “high”)
- breathing difficulties, which can worsen sleep apnea
- headaches, dizziness and confusion, which increase the risk of falls and fractures

Long-term effects of opioids

Long-term side effects associated with the use of opioids include:

- tolerance to the drug, which increases the risk of addiction.
- addiction disorder
- liver damage
- infertility in women
- a perception that the pain is getting worse
- potentially fatal withdrawal symptoms in newborns when the mother takes opioids

You may experience withdrawal symptoms if you quickly reduce or stop taking your opioid medication. Consult your doctor before reducing your dose.

Keep your medication in a safe place

Keep your medication in a safe place to prevent someone else from taking your medication:

- **Never** share your medication with anyone: it is **illegal**, can cause health problems for others, or lead to death.
- Keep a regular count of the number of tablets left in a package or box.
- Keep opioids out of the reach of children and teenagers

Unused opioid drugs should **always** be:

- kept out of sight and out of reach of children and pets,
- stored in a safe place to prevent theft, problematic or accidental consumption,
- returned to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

The content of this document is based in part on the *About Opioids* page of the Government of Canada website. Visit www.canada.ca/opioids for more information.

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