



Opioid Use and Safety

Helpful information for patients



Controlled Substances and Opioids

Controlled substances are drugs that have a greater chance for misuse and addiction.
Opioids are controlled substances.

Opioids are chemicals that help with pain by lowering the level of pain signals that get to the brain. Examples of common opioids are oxycodone (OxyContin or Percocet), hydrocodone (Vicodin), and morphine.

Acute vs. Chronic Pain

Acute pain usually starts suddenly and has a known cause. Acute pain may be caused after an injury or surgery, and acute pain gets better as your body heals.

For acute pain, opioids are usually used three to seven days or less.

Chronic pain stays after the normal time of healing and may last weeks, months, or longer.

Chronic pain needs a more individualized treatment based on the needs of the patient. Health care providers may prescribe opioids to treat chronic pain, but they can have serious risks and side effects.

Alternative Treatment Options

These treatments may work better than opioids and have fewer risks and side effects:

Over-the-counter pain relievers (such as Tylenol, Advil, or Aleve), physical therapy and exercise, heat and cold therapy, stretching exercises, physical therapy, occupational therapy, acupuncture, and massage.



Talk to your healthcare provider about ways to manage pain that do not involve prescription opioids.

For Patients Prescribed Opioids

- ✓ Know the name of the medication, how much and how often to take it, and possible risks.
- ✓ Talk to your doctor about how it will interact with other medications you take.
- ✓ Get Naloxone and learn how to use it.
- ✓ Never take opioids in large amounts or more than prescribed.
- ✓ Avoid taking opioids with alcohol.
- ✓ Talk to your doctor before taking opioids with anti-anxiety medications or muscle relaxants because taking opioids with these things can increase risk of addiction and overdose.
- ✓ Never sell or share prescription opioids and never use another person's prescription opioids.

Safely Store Opioids

Unused medicines in your home are at risk to be wrongly used by others in your home.

Improper use of opioids is a top cause of accidental death.

Store prescription opioids in a secure place and out of reach of others like visitors, children, and family.



Safely Dispose Opioids

There are many locations in Pennsylvania that offer safe disposal of old, unwanted, or expired opioids.

To find a drug take-back location, visit DDAP's website: bit.ly/Rxtake-back

For more information on ways to dispose opioids safely, visit FDA's website: bit.ly/Rxdisposal

Withdrawal

When a patient who has been treated with opioids stops taking their medication or is tapered, the patient may experience **withdrawal** symptoms such as:

anxiety, restlessness, tremor, nausea, diarrhea, abdominal cramping, dizziness, hot flashes, shiver, and trouble falling or staying asleep.

The experience of withdrawal symptoms is different for every person.

Opioid Tapering

Tapering means to reduce opioid dosage over time.



Patients should talk to their healthcare provider before they stop taking an opioid. They can set up a slow tapering plan to reduce withdrawal symptoms.

Opioid Tolerance, Dependence, and Opioid Use Disorder

Opioid tolerance happens when a person taking opioids begins to experience less of a response to the medication and needs more to get the same effect.

Opioid dependence happens when bad physical or emotional symptoms happen when a person stops taking opioids.



Opioid use disorder is a disease.

When people take an opioid, they may like how it makes them feel at first.

They believe they can control how much and how often they take it, but opioids can take away control and change the brain.

After time, someone with opioid use disorder needs the drug to feel normal. They may need to start taking more just to get the same feeling.

Opioid Use Disorder Signs and People at High-Risk

Signs of opioid use disorder:

- ✓ Opioids can become more important than the need to eat or sleep.
- ✓ Getting and taking opioids can become all you think about.
- ✓ Addiction to opioids can replace all the things you used to enjoy.
- ✓ You might do almost anything to keep taking opioids, like steal or lie.
- ✓ Addiction may make you moody, have memory loss, or have trouble thinking and making decisions.

Everyone's body reacts to drugs differently.

Avoid Opioid Overdose

Overdosing on opioids can make your breathing slow or even stop.

Naloxone can reverse an overdose. Naloxone is available through a state-wide standing order, which means you do not need a prescription. Most pharmacies carry Naloxone.

For more information, visit: pa.gov/opioids.

Find Addiction Treatment

24/7 help is available for people battling opioid use disorder.

Call **1.800.662.4357** or visit: www.ddap.pa.gov.

Patient Advocacy Program

The Patient Advocacy Program is a point of contact for patients who are prescribed a controlled substance and have lost access to care. Patients may contact the Program, Monday through Friday 8:00 AM-4:00 PM, by emailing ra-dh-advocacy@pa.gov or calling **844.377.7367**. Visit bit.ly/patientadvocacyPA for more information, education, and resources.