



Opioid Safety: The Basics

What are opioids?

Opioids are strong medications, sometimes prescribed to help manage pain, but taking more than needed or using them in the wrong way can be dangerous.

Why are opioids a hot topic?

Because of their addictive nature, opioids have the potential to be abused if not taken correctly. Prescription opioids, like oxycodone, are legal only with a prescription from a doctor. Other opioids, like fentanyl, may also be prescribed by a doctor, but are sometimes illegally added to other illicit drugs like cocaine, which can result in an overdose death.

What is Opioid Misuse?

Avoiding the misuse of opioids starts with understanding what it means. Misuse means taking an opioid in any way that is not exactly prescribed by a doctor. This can include:

- ...taking the medication in higher doses or frequencies than prescribed by your doctor
- ...taking someone else's prescription
- ...taking the medication for recreational purposes



Identifying the Signs of Opioid Misuse

Here are some ways you can identify that someone may be misusing an opioid:

- Changes in their normal habits including sleep, exercise and eating
- Weight loss
- Being sedated or drowsy
- Feeling unusually happy or excited
- Problems with attention and memory
- Isolation from friends or family members
- Less sensitive to pain
- Stealing from others or new financial difficulties
- Problems with work, school or relationships

Preventing an Overdose

When prescribed an opioid, it's important to follow these tips to prevent an accidental overdose:

- Take your medication as prescribed
- Never take more medication than directed
- Tell your doctor about other medications you take
- Never mix pain medication with alcohol, sleeping pills or illicit substances
- Never take anyone else's medication
- Dispose of unused medication safely
- Prevent anyone else (including children and pets) from accessing your medication
- Understand the signs of an overdose include troubled breathing, very small pupils and difficulty waking up

Naloxone: A Lifesaver

Naloxone is a nasal spray that can help reverse opioid overdoses, including overdoses related to heroin, fentanyl or prescription opioid medications. It can be a lifesaver when used quickly and correctly in times of an opioid overdose.



Anybody prescribed opioids or taking care of someone prescribed opioids should carry Naloxone in case of an emergency. If you think someone is having an opioid overdose, give them naloxone and call 911 right away. Even if the person wakes up or feels better, they must still go to the hospital for medical attention, because the overdose can return after naloxone wears off.



Naloxone is available for free and at low costs in many communities across the state. Learn more by scanning the QR code.

Have a question about your medications? Ask a pharmacist!

Scan the QR code for more resources:

