

Risk Management for Prescription Opioids

What are Prescription Opioids?

Opioids are natural or synthetic chemicals that relieve pain by binding to receptors in your brain or body to reduce the intensity of pain signals reaching the brain.

Opioid pain medications are sometimes prescribed by clinicians to treat pain.

Common Types include:

- Hydrocodone
- Oxycodone
- Oxymorphone
- Morphine

What you need to Know

1. When are Opioids Prescribed?

Prescription opioids can be used to help relieve moderate-to-severe pain and are often prescribed following a surgery or injury, or for certain health conditions.

These medications can be an important part of treatment but also come with risks. Health care providers and patients should work together to achieve the best result (reduction of pain) with the safest regimen, which may or may not include an opioid

2. Opioids and Chronic Pain

Many patients suffer from chronic pain, a major public health concern in the United States.

Patients with chronic pain deserve a safe and effective pain management program that includes multiple approaches, such as evidence-based medications and non-medications like physical therapy.

There is insufficient evidence that prescription opioids control chronic pain effectively over the longer term, and there is evidence that other treatments can be effective with less harm.

3. What are the risks and side effects of opioid use?

Prescription opioids carry serious risks of dependence, addiction, and overdose, especially with prolonged use.

As many as 1 in 4 people receiving prescription opioids long term in a primary care setting struggles with addiction.

An opioid overdose presents as significantly slowed breathing or respiratory suppression, which can cause sudden death.

Long-term opioids use side effects:

- Tolerance – requiring more medication over time to achieve the same level of pain relief
- Physical Symptoms

Withdrawal symptoms when the medication is suddenly stopped

- Increased Sensitivity to Pain (Hyperalgesia)
- Constipation
- Nausea, Vomiting, and Dry Mouth
- Sleepiness and Dizziness
- Depression
- Low levels of testosterone that can result in lower sex drive, energy, and strength
- Itching and Sweating

Psychological Symptoms

- Strong emotional craving for opioids
- Preoccupation with obtaining and using opioids
- Loss of interest in other activities
- Using the opioids to cope with life activities such as sleeping and socializing

4. Greater Risk and More Caution Should be Utilized with Patients when there is a:

- History of drug misuse, substance use disorder, or overdose
- Mental Health condition (such as depression or anxiety)
- Sleep Apnea
- Older age (65 years or older)
- Pregnancy

5. Risks of Medication Interactions

Substances and medications to avoid unless specifically advised by a health care provider as they also increase the risk of respiratory suppression:

- Benzodiazepines
- Muscle Relaxants
- Hypnotics
- Other prescription opioids

6. Treatment options for managing pain?

It is important to work with your health care provider to manage pain, including options that do not involve prescription opioids.

Some of these options may work better and have fewer risks and side effects.

Options may include:

- Pain relievers such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Motrin), and naproxen (Aleve).
- Some medications are also used for depression or seizures.

- Physical therapy and exercise.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy, a psychological, goal-directed approach, in which patients learn how to modify physical, behavioral, and emotional triggers of pain and stress.

Staying safe if you are prescribed opioids for pain:

- Never take opioids in greater amounts OR more often than prescribed
- Follow-up with your primary health care provider regularly:
- Work together to create a plan on how to manage your pain

Talk-Discuss:

- alternative ways to manage pain;
- side effects and any concerns, and
- opioid use disorders

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 and out of reach of others and children

Safely dispose unused prescription opioids through a drug take-back program. Visit the FDA website for guidance about safely disposing prescriptions.

Visit www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose to learn about the risks of an opioid use disorder and overdose.

If you or someone you care about needs help with a possible substance use problem or needs help locating treatment services, please call:

Illinois Helpline
for Opioids and Other Substances 1-833-2FINDHELP
www.helplineil.org

The Illinois Helpline is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week for people experiencing substance use disorders, families, and anyone seeking information and support.

The Illinois Helpline is confidential and free. Helpline specialists are trained in evidence-based approaches to help connect callers with treatment and recovery support services.

Alternative Illinois Department of Public Health resource

<https://dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/prevention-wellness/medical-cannabis.html>