

Opioid Safety Information for Families



What are opioids?

- A group of prescription medicines that help relieve moderate to severe pain.
- Stronger than most over-the-counter pain relievers.

Opioids are:

- Safe to use for certain pain conditions.
- Safe to use only when you follow the directions of a health care provider.
- Harmful when they are not used the right way, because they can cause serious side effects.

What are the different types of opioids?

There are two types of opioids:

1. **Short-acting/immediate-release (for example, oxycodone or dilaudid)**

Short-acting opioids start working faster but do not last as long as long-acting opioids. They are meant to be used for a short period of time.

2. **Long-acting/extended-release (for example, methadone)**

Long-acting opioids work slower than short-acting opioids but last much longer. They are usually used in special situations when there is severe chronic pain, and after short-acting opioids are used first.

When should I use opioids?

Your child's health care provider may prescribe opioids after surgery or for disease processes that cause moderate to severe pain in your child. This can be for conditions such as cancer or sickle cell disease.

Studies show that opioids can be helpful for short-term pain relief. But they do not show that long-term use of opioids is good for pain management.

What are the major risks of using opioids?

- Addiction (an intense urge to use the drug).
 - Opioid addiction is higher in patients who have had substance abuse and mental health disorders before.
- Overdose (passing out or trouble breathing).
- Dangerous when taken with benzodiazepines, alcohol, or central nervous system depressants without letting your healthcare provider know.

How can I make sure to use opioids in a safe way?

- **Do not** use opioids without clear guidance from your health care provider.
- **Do not** change the dose or how often you take an opioid without checking with your health care provider.
- **Do not** share your opioid medicine or use someone else's medicines.
- **Do discuss** all medicines, supplements, and drugs that you are taking with your healthcare provider. This can be any other:
 - prescriptions
 - vitamins
 - over-the-counter medicines
 - supplements such as cannabidiols (CBD)
 - any other drugs and alcohol

If you have any concerns, talk to your health care provider who prescribed the opioids.

What do I do with the opioids I do not use?

- **Throw away any unused opioids at a drug take-back location.**
- **Check with your pharmacist about how to safely throw them away.**
- **Do not keep them for future use.**

What are other ways to treat pain?

Multimodal pain management treatments are the best way to manage pain with or without using opioids. These can be:

- Nerve blocks and epidurals (single injection or catheters with numbing medicine).
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as Celebrex, Motrin, Ibuprofen, Advil, and Naproxen.
- Other pain medicines such as Tylenol, muscle relaxants, numbing or cooling patches/creams.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy, by trained professionals, can help you develop skills to better manage your pain. This can be techniques that help relax, distract, and change negative thoughts about pain.
- Physical therapy and occupational therapy to help you move in a safe way.
- Integrative therapies such as acupuncture and massage therapies.
- Treatments such rest, ice, heat, elevation, compression, and activity pacing as your healthcare provider tells you to.
- Other therapies that can help are music or art therapy, or other recreational activities.