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URL of this page: <https://medlineplus.gov/opioidsandopioidusedisorderoud.html>

Opioids and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD)

Also called: Opioid abuse, Opioid addiction, Opioid misuse

What are opioids?

Opioids, sometimes called narcotics, are a type of drug. They include strong prescription **pain relievers** [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>] such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, fentanyl, and tramadol. The illegal drug heroin [<https://medlineplus.gov/heroin.html>] is also an opioid. Some opioids are made from the opium plant, and others are synthetic (man-made).

A health care provider may give you a prescription opioid to reduce pain after you have had a major injury or surgery. You may get them if you have severe pain from health conditions like cancer. Some providers prescribe them for **chronic pain** [<https://medlineplus.gov/chronicpain.html>] .

What are the side effects and risks of opioids?

Opioids can cause side effects such as drowsiness, mental fog, nausea, and constipation. They may also cause slowed breathing, which can lead to overdose deaths. If someone has signs of an **overdose** [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidoverdose.html>] , call 911. These signs may include:

- Very small pupils of the eyes
- Falling asleep or loss of consciousness
- Slow, shallow breathing
- Choking or gurgling sounds
- Vomiting
- Limp body
- Pale, blue, or cold skin
- Faint heartbeat
- Purple lips and fingernails

When using opioids, there is also a risk of opioid use disorder (OUD).

What is opioid use disorder (OUD)?

Opioid use disorder (OUD) means that you have a problematic pattern of using opioids. The pattern causes a lot of distress and impairment (meaning that it causes problems in and interferes with your daily life). Instead of OUD, sometimes people use the terms "opioid dependence" and "opioid addiction." Dependence means feeling withdrawal symptoms when not taking the drug. Addiction is a chronic brain disease that causes a person to compulsively seek out drugs, even though they cause harm.

The risk of OUD is higher if you **misuse the medicines** [<https://medlineplus.gov/prescriptiondrugmisuse.html>] . Misuse can include taking more than your prescribed dose or taking it more often, using it to get high, or taking someone else's opioids.

Opioid use disorder and overdoses are serious public health problems in the United States. As more people misuse opioids, more women are **misusing opioids during pregnancy** [<https://medlineplus.gov/pregnancyandopioids.html>] . This can lead to

health risks for the mother and baby. The baby may be born with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS). NAS is a group of withdrawal symptoms that a baby has after being exposed to drugs during pregnancy.

Another problem with increased opioid misuse is that it can also lead to more heroin use. There are some people who switch from prescription opioids to heroin because heroin may be cheaper and easier to get.

How are opioid use disorder (OUD) and opioid overdose treated?

There are effective medicines to treat OUD [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidusedisorderoutdtreatment.html>] . Using medicines to treat OUD is called medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD). MOUD can help you stop using the drug, get through withdrawal, and cope with cravings. It is often combined with behavioral therapy and counseling. Having support from family and friends can also help.



There is also a medicine called naloxone which can treat opioid overdoses. It can reverse the effects of the overdose and prevent death if it is given quickly.

How can I prevent problems when taking prescription opioids?





To prevent problems with prescription opioids [<https://medlineplus.gov/safeopioiduse.html>] , be sure to follow your doctor's instructions when taking them. Do not share your medicines with anyone else. Contact your doctor if you have any concerns about taking the medicines.

NIH: National Institute on Drug Abuse

Start Here

- National Opioids Crisis: Help and Resources [<https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/index.html>]
 (Department of Health and Human Services)
- Opioid Addiction [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/opioid-addiction/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/adiccion-a-los-opioides-es/?adfree=true>]
- Opioids [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/opioids>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/opioides>]


Diagnosis and Tests

- Drug Testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/drug-testing/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-drogas/>]
- Drug Use Screening Tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/drug-use-screening-tests/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-deteccion-del-uso-de-drogas/>]
- Mental Health Screening [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/mental-health-screening/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/evaluacion-de-salud-mental/>]
- Opioid Testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/opioid-testing/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-opiaceos/>]



Prevention and Risk Factors

- Opioid Overdose Prevention: Safety Advice for Patients and Family Members
[<https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/safety-advice-for-patients-family-members.pdf>]
(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) - **PDF**
- What to Ask Your Doctor before Taking Opioids [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/what-ask-your-doctor-taking-opioids>] (Food and Drug Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/articulos-para-el-consumidor-en-espanol/que-preguntar-su-medico-antes-de-tomar-opiaceos>]

Treatments and Therapies

- Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) Treatment: MedlinePlus Health Topic [https://medlineplus.gov/opioidusedisorderoudtreatment.html]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/opioidabuseandaddictiontreatment.html]


Related Issues

- Benzodiazepines and Opioids [https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/opioids/benzodiazepines-opioids]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/opioides/las-benzodiacepinas-y-los-opioides]
- Nonopioid Therapies [https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/manage-treat-pain/nonopioid-therapies.html] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Opioids and Dental Pain [https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/opioids]  (National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research)
Also in Spanish [https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/espanol/temas-de-salud/los-opioides]

Specifics

- About Prescription Opioids [https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/about/prescription-opioids.html] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Fentanyl [https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/fentanyl]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/el-fentanilo]
- Fentanyl [https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/about/fentanyl.html] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Heroin: MedlinePlus Health Topic [https://medlineplus.gov/heroin.html]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/heroin.html]
- Hydromorphone [https://www.dea.gov/factsheets/hydromorphone] (Drug Enforcement Administration)
- Prescription Opioids DrugFacts [https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-opioids]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/drugfacts/opioides-de-prescripcion-medica]



Genetics

- Opioid addiction: MedlinePlus Genetics [https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/opioid-addiction]  (National Library of Medicine)


Images

- Hydrocodone [https://www.dea.gov/galleries/drug-images/hydrocodone] (Drug Enforcement Administration)
- Narcotics [https://www.dea.gov/galleries/drug-images/narcotics] (Drug Enforcement Administration)


Videos and Tutorials

- How Naloxone Saves Lives in Opioid Overdose [https://medlineplus.gov/medlineplus-videos/how-naloxone-saves-lives-in-opioid-overdose/]   (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/videos-de-medlineplus/como-la-naloxona-salva-vidas-por-sobredosis-de-opioides/]

Statistics and Research

- Drug Overdose Deaths: Facts and Figures [https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Opioid Dependence and Addiction [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22opiate+addiction%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles


References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Effects of the Communities That HEAL intervention on initiation, retention, and... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40684522>]
- Article: Deep Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation in Patients With Opioid Use Disorder: A... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40536869>]
- Article: Cortisol and β -Endorphin Responses During a Two-Month Exercise Training Program in... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40507987>]
- Opioids and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Prescription+Drug+Misuse%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+OR+%22Opioid-Related+Disorders%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]


Reference Desk

- Commonly Used Terms for Opioids and Drug Overdose [<https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/glossary/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Find an Expert



- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [<https://www.cdc.gov/>]
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/spanish/>]
- Drug Enforcement Administration [<https://www.dea.gov/>]
- FindTreatment.gov [<https://findtreatment.gov/>] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://findtreatment.gov/es>]
- Food and Drug Administration [<https://www.fda.gov/>]
- National Institute on Drug Abuse [<https://nida.nih.gov/>] 
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es>]
- Partnership to End Addiction [<https://drugfree.org/>]
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [<https://www.samhsa.gov/>]

Children

- Accidental Exposures to Fentanyl Patches Continue to Be Deadly to Children [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/accidental-exposures-fentanyl-patches-continue-be-deadly-children>]  (Food and Drug Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/articulos-para-el-consumidor-en-espanol/la-exposicion-accidental-los-parches-de-fentanilo-sigue-siendo-mortal-para-los-ninos>]
- Opioids: What Parents Need to Know [<https://drugfree.org/drugs/opioids/>] (Partnership to End Addiction)
- What Is Fentanyl? (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/drugs-fentanyl.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/drugs-fentanyl.html>]
- What Is Narcan (Naloxone)? (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/narcan.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/narcan.html>]
- What Is Xylazine? (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/drugs-xylazine.html>] (Nemours Foundation)

Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/drugs-xylozine.html>]

Teenagers

- Mind Matters: The Body's Response to Opioids [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/parents-educators/mind-matter-series/opioids>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/research-topics/parents-educators/mind-matter-series/opioides>]
- Opioid Epidemic: How to Protect Your Family [<https://www.healthychildren.org/english/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/pages/the-opioid-epidemic.aspx>]  (American Academy of Pediatrics)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.healthychildren.org/Spanish/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Paginas/the-opioid-epidemic.aspx>]

Patient Handouts

- Opiate and opioid withdrawal [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000949.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000949.htm>]
- Opioid intoxication [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000948.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000948.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Acetaminophen and codeine overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002562.htm>]

Codeine overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002613.htm>]

Hydrocodone and acetaminophen overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002670.htm>]

Hydrocodone/oxycodone overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007285.htm>]

Hydromorphone overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002633.htm>]

Methadone overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002679.htm>]

Morphine overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002502.htm>]

Opiate and opioid withdrawal [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000949.htm>]

Opioid intoxication [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000948.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Heroin [<https://medlineplus.gov/heroin.html>]

Opioid Overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidoverdose.html>]

Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) Treatment [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidusedisorderoutdtreatment.html>]

Pregnancy and Opioids [<https://medlineplus.gov/pregnancyandopioids.html>]

Prescription Drug Misuse [<https://medlineplus.gov/prescriptiondrugmisuse.html>]

Safe Opioid Use [<https://medlineplus.gov/safeopioiduse.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Opioids and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD)* is the National Institute on Drug Abuse [<https://www.drugabuse.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English

[<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/opioidsandopioidusedisorderoud.html>] on *Opioids and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD)*

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

'I Choose to Climb Instead of Fall': One Woman's Story of Opioid Use Disorder and Joining an NIH Clinical Trial [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/i-choose-to-climb-instead-of-fall>]

Fentanyl 101 [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/fentanyl-101>]

Substance Use Disorders: Get the Facts and Find Support [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/substance-use-disorders-get-the-facts-and-find-support>]

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