

Preventing Opioid Use Disorder

What increases your risk

Anyone who takes prescription opioids can develop opioid use disorder. You may also develop tolerance—meaning that over time you might need higher doses to relieve your pain, putting you at higher risk for a potentially fatal overdose. You can also develop physical dependence—meaning you have withdrawal symptoms when the medication is stopped.

Take and store opioids properly:

- Never take prescription opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed.
- Avoid taking opioids with alcohol and other substances or medications. It is very dangerous to combine opioids with other drugs, especially those that cause drowsiness, such as:
 - Benzodiazepines (such as Xanax® and Valium®)
 - Muscle relaxants (such as Soma® or Flexeril®)
 - Sleep aids (such as Ambien® or Lunesta®)
 - Other prescription opioids
- Do not share or sell your prescription opioids.
- Store prescription opioids in a secure place, out of reach of others (including children, family, friends, and visitors).
- Dispose of unused prescription opioids at the end of your treatment. Find your community drug take-back program or your pharmacy mail-back program, or flush them down the toilet following guidance from the [Drug Disposal: FDA's Flush List for Certain Medicines | FDA](#).

Ways to prevent opioid use disorder

There are a variety of ways to help reduce exposure to opioids and prevent opioid use disorder.

- [Prescription drug monitoring programs](#), which are state-run databases that track prescriptions for controlled substances and can help improve opioid prescribing, inform clinical practice, and protect those at risk.

- [Academic detailing](#) to educate providers about opioid prescribing guidelines and facilitating conversations with patients about the risks and benefits of pain treatment options
- Quality improvement programs in health care systems to increase implementation of recommended prescribing practices
- Patient education on the safe storage and disposal of prescription opioids
- Improve awareness and share resources about the risks of prescription opioids, and the cost of overdose for patients and families.
 - See CDC's [Rx Awareness](#) Campaign website

Making a plan

It is important to work with your doctor to make safe and effective pain management decisions together. You can discuss your specific circumstances and situation to find treatments that are effective for your body. Share your concerns about the benefits and risks of prescription opioids and other pain treatment strategies. [Nonopioid treatment options](#), treatments that do not use opioids and sometimes may not use medications, may provide greater benefits relative to risks.

Be sure to ask questions, communicate openly, and share your feelings. Having open, honest conversations with your doctor can help build a relationship with shared understanding. By deciding treatment recommendations specific to your situation, you can [reduce the risks](#) associated with pain treatment. Talking openly with your doctor can help make sure you're getting care that is safe, effective, and right for you.

Before taking opioid medication for pain:

- Set treatment goals with your clinician for pain and function in your daily life.
- Talk to your doctor about pain treatment options, including ones that do not involve prescription opioids.
- Discuss the risks and benefits of opioid therapy.
- Talk openly with your doctor to make sure you're getting care that is safe, effective, and right for you.
- Tell your doctor about your medical history and if you or anyone in your family has a history of [substance use disorders \(SUDs\)](#).

If you are prescribed opioids for pain management

- Follow up with your doctor within the first few days of starting your prescription to ensure opioids are helping.

- You should also discuss what kind of pain relief and improvement you can expect overall. Opioids can reduce pain in the short-term but will not likely relieve all your pain.
- Also let your doctor know about any side effects or concerns you have about using opioids.
- Develop your personal pain management plan with your doctor which may include:
 - Your personal treatment goals, which describe what you may achieve as you make progress
 - Information about treatment options
 - Referral to specialists as needed

Treatment

Preventing overdose death and finding treatment options are the first steps to recovery. Treatment may save a life and can help people struggling with opioid addiction get their lives back on track by allowing them to counteract addiction's powerful effects on their brain and behavior. **The overall goal of treatment is to help people regain their health and social function.**

Resource

SAMHSA's National Helpline is a great resource to share with someone who may have a substance use disorder. Call **1-800-662-HELP (4537)**.

Opioid use disorder treatment can vary depending the patient's individual needs, occur in a variety of settings, take many different forms, and last for varying lengths of time.

To treat those with opioid use disorder, it is crucial to expand access to evidence-based treatments, including medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD). Research has demonstrated that MOUD is especially effective in helping people recover from their OUD;⁴⁵⁶ counseling and psychosocial support may also provide additional benefit for some patients.

Medications for opioid use disorder

Medications used in the treatment of opioid use disorder support a person's recovery by helping to normalize brain chemistry, relieving cravings, and in some cases preventing withdrawal symptoms. The choice to include medication as part of recovery is a personal medical decision, but the evidence for medications to support successful recovery is strong.

MOUD medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA):

- Methadone

- Buprenorphine
- Naltrexone

Talk with a doctor to find out what types of treatments are available in your area and what options are best for you and/or your loved one. Addiction is a chronic disease; **be sure to ask your doctor about the risk of returning to use and overdose.**

Additional treatment options

- Outpatient counseling
- Inpatient rehabilitation