About Your Pain Management

Answers to common questions about opioids

This handout explains the goals of managing pain with opioids, which are a type of prescription pain medicine. It also reviews the guidelines that you are expected to follow, information about the risks and benefits of treatment, and how to get refills.

This material is in addition to the talks you have with your health care providers. It is important that you fully understand this information, so please read this handout thoroughly.

Using Opioid Medicines to Treat Your Pain

You and your provider – doctor, nurse practitioner, or physician’s assistant – have decided that using opioid medicine might help your pain. This type of medicine may help reduce your pain, and reducing your pain may help improve your function. Opioids rarely get rid of pain completely.

When you take opioids, it is important that you understand the potential risks and benefits. It is also important that you follow the guidelines in this handout and let us know what you expect from us.

You will be asked to sign a Pain Management Patient Care Agreement so that both you and your provider understand how this treatment will proceed. All patients being treated with opioids are asked to sign this type of agreement.

What are the benefits and goals of treatment with opioids?

The main goals of treatment of pain with opioids are to reduce pain and improve function.
You and your provider will talk about using a pain scale to both monitor and describe your pain. This way, when you come to clinic, you can tell the provider if or how much your pain has been reduced.

Also, when you come to clinic, your provider will talk with you about how your function is affected by the medicines. For example, your provider may want to know how far you can walk, how long you can sit, if you are able to do housework, or if you can do certain activities.

Your provider will work with you to adjust your medicine levels to find the right balance between pain relief, improved function, and side effects. Most experts agree that high doses of opioids may actually make some kinds of pain worse, so your provider may tell you there is a dose you cannot go above. “Flare-ups” are normal and should not usually be treated by increasing the dose or taking extra medicine. Your provider will likely want to use urine or blood drug tests to help guide your treatment.

**What medicines will be used?**

There are many types of opioid medicines – both natural and man-made. There are many types because they do not all work the same way for each person. Also, the side effects vary from person to person. Your provider will talk with you about which medicine is likely to work best for you.

**What are the common side effects and risks of opioids?**

- Most people who take opioids develop a physical dependency over time. They may develop a psychological dependency as well. They also may become tolerant to the pain-relieving effects of the opioids at safe prescribed doses.
- Taking opioids during pregnancy may endanger an unborn child’s health. Children born to mothers on opioids will likely be physically dependent on them at birth.
- Most experts agree that people with a history of substance abuse or addiction should not use opioids because of the high risk of addiction. **If you have a history of substance abuse or addiction of any type, you must tell your provider.** You may need a different type of treatment (see “What other types of therapies may be used to treat pain?” on page 4).

Your provider will talk with you about side effects that may occur with the medicine you are taking. Some of the common side effects of opioids are:

**Constipation**

Most opioid medicines cause constipation. Most times, constipation is treated with one or more of these methods:
• Increase the amount of fluids you drink, but do not increase fluids that contain caffeine or sugar, such as coffee or cola.
• Increase the amount of fiber you eat.
• Use a stool softener or laxative, if your provider recommends one.

**Feeling Drowsy**

Many opioid medicines can cause drowsiness, mental clouding, slowed reaction time, impaired ability to concentrate and think clearly, and loss of coordination. Do **not** drive or use dangerous equipment until you have determined that doing so will not put you or others at risk.

You may have to be on a medicine for a week or longer before you will know if you can drive safely while taking it. You will want to be sure that it does not affect your level of alertness or your thinking ability. If you are involved in a traffic incident while you are taking opioids, the police can charge you with “driving under the influence” (DUI).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Side Effects</th>
<th>Withdrawal Symptoms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rash and/or itching</td>
<td>Sweating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dry eyes</td>
<td>Nausea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blurred vision</td>
<td>Abdominal pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upset stomach</td>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inability to urinate</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low blood pressure</td>
<td>Rapid heart beat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slow heart beat</td>
<td>Muscle aches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depressed mood</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Slowed breathing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with balance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Decreased sex drive (in men, decreased testosterone)</td>
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What other types of therapies may be used to help treat pain?

Ask your health care provider if any of these may be helpful for you.

- Exercise, massage, hypnosis, or other complementary alternative therapies
- Other types of medicines (anticonvulsants, anti-inflammatories, and antidepressants)
- Meeting with a counselor for psychological and behavioral therapy
- Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulators (TENS) that use electrical stimulation of nerves to disrupt pain signals
- Spinal cord stimulators (SCS), which are implanted and give off electrical pulses that interfere with pain signals to the brain

Follow These Guidelines

- Expect our office staff to treat you with respect and in a courteous manner. Please treat them the same way.
- If you have a problem with an office staff member, tell your provider.
- Be honest with your provider. It is vital that you provide complete and accurate information. Your provider needs to know:
  - Your medical history, which may include getting copies of past medical records
  - Who has treated you in the past
  - About any pain treatment you have had in the past
  - Your history of alcohol and drug use, including any addiction history
- Do not ask office staff for advice about medicines or permission to make changes in your medicines. The only staff authorized to make medicine changes and adjustments are your provider, a nurse (only after talking with your provider), or a provider who is covering for your provider in his or her absence.
- Give yourself time to adjust to medicine changes and/or adjustments to dosage levels. These changes may produce new side effects that may take a few days to get better.
- While you are taking opioids, do NOT drink alcohol or take street drugs. Doing so is very dangerous. It can cause brain damage, severe injury, or death.
- Never take pain medicine that is not prescribed for you.
- Never share your prescription with others. It is dangerous and illegal.
Consult Visits

Some pain problems are hard to treat. Your provider may request a consult by another provider or several other providers. The consult may be done by someone in the same specialty as your provider or by someone with training in a different specialty.

The purpose of the consult is to help diagnose the cause of your pain and/or to explore ways to treat it.

Please keep your appointment if you are referred for a consult visit. Your provider will talk with the consultant after your visit.

Treat Your Prescriptions and Medicines Like Cash

The U.S. Department of Health and Drug Enforcement Administration strictly controls prescriptions. They check all prescriptions written for opioids very closely. These prescriptions are written for a set time and are expected to last for that set time.

Treat your prescriptions like cash. Just like cash, prescriptions that are lost, stolen, or damaged will NOT be replaced.

This is also the way you should treat your medicines. They will not be replaced until a refill is allowed. To keep your prescription safe:

• Do not open medicines over the sink or toilet.
• Do not leave your medicines where other members of the household may have access to them.

Remember, if you use up your medicine before the time scheduled for refill because you take too much, a refill will not be issued.

How to Get Refills

• How you get a refill depends on the types of medicine you take. Some medicines can be called into a pharmacy. Other types require a written prescription. Your provider will tell you what you need to do when your medicines are prescribed.

• Please use only one pharmacy for your medicine refills. You should expect that only one person will prescribe your pain medicines, as well as any other medicines that might affect alertness or thinking, such as sleeping pills, tranquilizers, and muscle relaxers.

• If your insurance company requires your primary care provider to write all of your prescriptions, we will be happy to work with your provider to make sure that prescriptions are written for the correct medicines and dose amounts.

• For refills that can be called in, call our office _____ business days BEFORE your prescription expires. This gives your provider time to review your records before approving the refill.
When to Call Your Provider

- **If you have an adverse reaction to your medicine**, or think you are having one, stop taking it right away and call your provider or clinic.

- **If you think your medicine dose needs adjusting, do not change the dosage on your own without the advice of your provider**. You may need to make an appointment with your provider for the best and safest dosage adjustment.

- **If you are prescribed an opioid medicine for a new or acute problem**, such as a broken bone, surgery, or dental problem, be sure to:
  - Tell this provider about the other pain medicines you take, so he or she can decide if it is safe for you to take all the prescribed medicines together. Please note that this is the only time when it is OK for another provider to write a prescription for you for an opioid medicine.
  - Call your provider or clinic to alert us that you are taking additional opioids. We will want to know how long the condition is expected to last so we may need to coordinate with the other provider to assure that only one provider is writing prescriptions for you.
  - Keep taking your regular medicines as prescribed.

- Every time you receive a prescription for a new pain medicine, including non-opioid medicines, from a provider outside of this clinic, call your provider or clinic.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Clinic: ____________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________

Phone: ____________________________

Provider: __________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________

Phone: ____________________________