

About Your Pain Management

Answers to common questions about opioids

This handout explains the goals of managing pain with opioid medicines. It 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 healthcare providers. It is important that you fully understand this information. Please read this handout thoroughly.

Why do I need to take opioids?

The main goals of opioid treatment are to reduce pain and improve function. You and your healthcare provider have decided that using opioid medicine might help your pain. Opioids may help reduce your pain, and reducing your pain may help improve your function.

Please know that opioids rarely get rid of all pain.

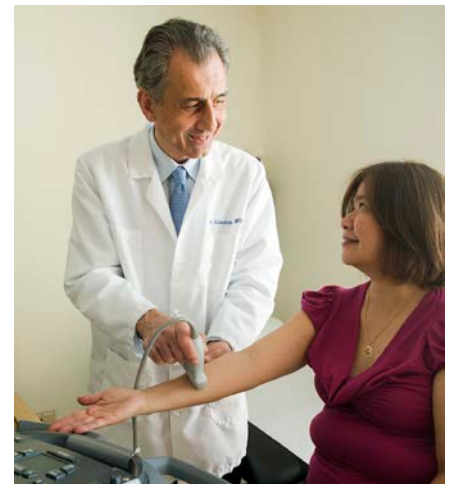
What do I need to do?

When you take opioids, it is important that you understand the possible risks and benefits. You must also follow the guidelines in this handout and tell us what you expect from us.

What can I expect?

We will ask you to sign a Pain Management Patient Care Agreement so that both you and your provider understand how this treatment will proceed. All patients who receive opioids are asked to sign this type of agreement.

You and your provider will talk about using a pain scale to both monitor and describe your pain. This way, when you come to the clinic, you can tell the provider if or how much your pain has been reduced.



Your healthcare provider will work with you to adjust your medicine levels as needed.

When you come to the clinic, your provider will also talk with you about how the opioids are affecting your function. For instance, 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. Your provider will likely want to use urine or blood drug tests to help guide your treatment.

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,” when pain gets worse, are common. They should not usually be treated by increasing the dose or taking extra medicine.

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 become tolerant to the pain-relieving effects of the opioids at safe prescribed doses. They may also develop a psychological dependency.
- Women who are pregnant should not take opioids. Taking opioids during pregnancy may harm the unborn child. Children born to mothers on opioids will likely be physically dependent on the medicine 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.)



To help avoid constipation while you are taking opioids, increase the amount of high-fiber foods you eat.

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

Opioid medicines often cause constipation. Most times, constipation is treated with one or more of these methods:

- Increasing the amount of fluids you drink. Do **not** increase fluids that contain caffeine or sugar, such as coffee or cola.
- Increasing the amount of high-fiber foods you eat.
- Taking a stool softener or laxative, if your provider suggests one.

Feeling Drowsy

Many opioid medicines can cause drowsiness, mental fog, slowed reaction time, problems concentrating, and loss of coordination. Do **not** drive or use machines until you are sure that doing so will not put you or others at risk.

You may have to be on a medicine for 1 week or longer before you know if you can drive safely while taking it. Make 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).

Other Side Effects	Withdrawal Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rash and/or itching • Dry eyes • Blurred vision • Upset stomach • Inability to urinate • Low blood pressure, slow heart beat • Depressed mood • Slowed breathing • Problems with balance • Lower sex drive (in men, decreased testosterone) • Possible decreased immunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sweating • Nausea • Abdominal pain • Diarrhea • Anxiety • Rapid heart beat • Muscle aches

What other types of therapies may be used to help treat pain?

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

- Exercise, massage, hypnosis, or other helpful 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) that are implanted and give off electrical pulses that interfere with pain signals to the brain

Guidelines to Follow

- Expect our office staff to treat you with respect and in a polite manner. Please treat them the same way.
- If you have a problem with anyone on our staff, tell your provider.
- Be honest with your provider. It is vital that you provide full and accurate information. Your provider needs to know:
 - Your health 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 addictions
- Do not ask office staff for advice about medicines or permission to make changes in your medicines. The only staff who can 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 their absence.
- Give yourself time to adjust to medicine changes or adjustments to your doses. These changes may cause 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 want you to consult with one or more other providers. The consult may be with someone in the same specialty as your provider or with someone with training in a different specialty.

The purpose of the consult is to help diagnose the cause of your pain 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 closely check all prescriptions written for opioids. 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, we cannot give you a refill.

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 at the time your medicines are prescribed.

- Please use only 1 pharmacy for your medicine refills. Only 1 provider should 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 (PCP) to write all of your prescriptions, we will be happy to work with your PCP 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 a bad 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, talk with your provider. Do **not** change the dose on your own. You may need to make an appointment with your provider for this.
- 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 that they 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 tell us that you are taking other opioids. We will want to know how long the condition is expected to last. We may need to coordinate with the other provider to make sure that only 1 provider is writing prescriptions for you.
 - Keep taking your regular medicines as prescribed.
- Call your provider or clinic every time you receive a prescription for a new pain medicine, including non-opioid medicines, from a provider outside of this clinic.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Clinic: _____

Phone: _____

Provider: _____

Phone: _____