

Opioid Safety and Pain Control

For UW Medicine patients

This handout explains safety and pain control for patients who are taking opioid pain medicine.

Pain Control

We want to help you control your pain so that you can do the activities that will help you recover. Our goals are to keep you safe, prevent severe pain, and keep pain at a lower level. This means using both medicines **and** non-drug ways to manage your pain.

You can expect to have some pain and discomfort while you heal. Most people have mild to moderate pain with activity during recovery.

Even strong pain medicines do not remove all pain. You can also use non-drug methods such as heat, cold, or relaxation to help control pain.



If you have any questions about your pain medicines, talk with your provider or pharmacist.

Pain Medicines

Your doctor may prescribe strong pain medicines called *opioids*. Take opioids **ONLY** for severe pain that is not helped by other methods.

- Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, take both acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) to control your pain **before** you take prescription pain medicine. Take the doses listed on the bottles.
- You can also ask your provider about ways to control your pain without medication.

If you still have severe pain after trying these methods, take your opioid dose as prescribed.

What are the risks of taking opioids?

Some people have concerns about taking opioids. Talk with your provider if you have any questions. You have the right to **refuse** opioid treatment. If you do take opioids, you should not need to take them very long. **These are some of the risks of taking opioids:**

- Overdose
- More sensitive to pain
- Physical dependence
- Opioid use disorder
- Falls and accidents



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this handout.*

How much opioid medicine should I take?

The label on the opioid bottle gives the **maximum** (highest) dose you can take. **Never take more than the maximum dose.** Taking too much opioid can make you stop breathing or can even cause death. If your pain is under control, take less than the maximum dose.

If you do take the opioids, try to take less of it each day. This is called *tapering* or *weaning*. To do this, take a smaller dose each time, or increase the time between your doses.

Your goal is to control your pain with other methods like acetaminophen and ibuprofen, so that you no longer need to take opioids. Call your prescriber's clinic if you have any questions about tapering.

Opioid Safety

- Do **not** drink alcohol while taking opioids. Using both at the same time can cause severe health problems or even death.
- **Never** take more than your prescribed dose of opioids.
- Do **not** let anyone else use your opioids.
- Store your opioids in a secure place, where family, visitors, children, and pets cannot reach them.
- Help prevent opioid misuse and abuse. Safely discard any unused opioids.
- **Naloxone** is a medicine that temporarily reverses an opioid overdose. In Washington state, you can buy naloxone without a prescription from any pharmacy. Other states may require a prescription.

Unused Opioids

You do **not** need to use all your opioid medicine. If you have leftover or expired opioid pills:

- Drop them off during business hours at one of the UW Medicine Take-back Kiosks, located in our pharmacy lobbies.
- Visit these websites to find your nearest take-back site:
 - takebackyourmeds.org
 - doh.wa.gov/safemedreturn
 - medtakebackwashington.org
- Call Washington State Safe Medication Return: 844.482.5322
- If you cannot use a take-back program, flush the pills down the toilet.

Questions?

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

- **Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call:** _____
- **After hours and on weekends and holidays, call the Nurse Triage Line:** 206.520.7503.