

Opioid and Narcotic Painkillers: Know the Benefits, Understand the Dangers



About 2.3 million emergency room visits were made in 2010 because of reactions to drugs. Narcotic pain relievers, also known as opioids accounted for over 400,000, or 17%, of these visits.



Opioids are medications that decrease how much pain you feel. Opioids are also known as narcotics. Your doctor may give you these drugs for many types of pain, the flu, or a cough.

Examples of Opioid-Containing Medicines

| Name Brand | Generic Name | Illness Treated |
|---|--------------|--------------------------|
| Vicodin | Hydrocodone | injuries and dental pain |
| OxyContin, percocet | Oxycodone | Chronic or severe pain |
| Kadian, Avinza | Morphine | severe pain |
| Lomitol | Codeine | cough, severe diarrhea |
| Floricient with Codeine, Phrenilin with Caffeine and Codeine, Ascomp with Codeine | Codeine | headache |
| Cheratussin AC, Robitussin-AC, Iphen-C NR, Gualatussin AC | Codeine | cough |
| Phenflu, Maxiflu, Rolatuss, Calcitrine | Codeine | cough |

Common Reactions

While opioids are very effective medications, you can have reactions to them. They can make you

- sleepy,
- sick to your stomach,
- constipated,
- feel confused, or
- dizzy.

These reactions can happen suddenly and while taking the usual dose of your medicine that contains opioids. Be careful to follow your doctor's or pharmacist's instructions.

Many opioids will take about 90 minutes to become fully active in your body. Be sure to check the warning labels on the bottle: you may need to be careful going about ordinary activities such as driving.

Serious Reactions

If you take more than prescribed, or combine opioids with alcohol or some other drugs, such as tranquilizers and sedatives, they can cause

- clammy skin,
- weak muscles,
- dangerously low blood pressure,
- slowed or stopped breathing,
- coma, or
- death.

Do Not Share Opioid Painkillers

Never share the medication that your doctor has given you with someone else, even family members. Another person may react differently to the medications. You may be endangering someone's life if you give them your medicine.

Long-Term Problems

If you take opioids for a long time, your body can feel less of their effect. You may feel the need to use more of the drug to feel the effects of the medicine. Do not use more without talking to your doctor. Taking more opioids can increase the chance that you may have side effects or overdose. Opioids can be highly addictive if not managed carefully by a doctor.



■ *What Can I Do To Prevent Problems?*

While these drugs are effective for pain, you may want to ask your doctor if you can try a non-opioid drug first.

Also, if you do take opioids, talk to your doctor about limiting the time you take them. Tell your doctor about all other medications and drugs that you take and about how much alcohol that you consume. And be careful when driving. Ask your doctor about how long the medicine will be in your body and whether and when you can drive.

If you have any medicine left over, your local pharmacy has information on medication disposal. You also may go online at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration website to learn how to throw away the medicine: <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/UnderstandingOver-the-CounterMedicines/ucm107163.pdf>.



■ *Additional Opioid Resources*

National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse. What are opioids? Available at <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-are-opioids>

Food and Drug Administration. FDA works to reduce risk of opioid pain relievers. Available at <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/UCM307834.pdf>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (July 3, 2012). The DAWN Report: Highlights of the 2010 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) Findings on Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits. Rockville, MD. Available at <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/2k12/DAWN096/SR096EDHighlights2010.htm>



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