

Combating the Opioid Crisis



What you need to know

The spread of opioid addiction is a big concern. Right now in the U.S., nearly 2 million people are addicted to opioid pain relievers. You've likely heard of this crisis, but are you aware of what it means and how you can help?

WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are strong medications often prescribed for pain, the flu or a cough. While they are effective, they can have side effects, including drowsiness, stomach issues and confusion. They can also cause serious reactions if you take more than prescribed or mix them with other drugs, including weakness, extremely low blood pressure, slow or stopped breath, coma and even death.

If you take these medicines for an extended time, your body can feel less of their effect, causing some to want to use more of the drug to feel results. This can lead to more side effects, overdose or addiction. Common brands of opioid painkillers are Vicodin, Percocet and Oxycontin.

248,000

One study reported that nearly 248,000 children visiting emergency rooms between 2001 and 2008 had been accidentally poisoned by ingesting prescription medications.

12 million

Overdoses now cause more deaths than car crashes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported more than 12 million U.S. residents used prescription painkillers nonmedically in the past year.

1.4 million

1.4 million emergency room visits in 2011 were related to the misuse or abuse of prescription medicines, an increase of 114% since 2004.

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In 2011, prescription human medications were the No. 1 cause of pet poisoning.

HOW DO PEOPLE GET THEM?

Prescriptions: If you've had surgery, a bad flu, or other painful medical issues, your doctor might prescribe you an opioid. If you're prescribed one of these, consider asking your doctor if you can try a non-opioid drug first. If you do take them, talk to your doctor about limiting the length of time you take them. Restricting your intake can help lower your chances of dependency.

Through others: More than 70% of people who abuse prescription painkillers obtained them from family or friends, with or without permission. Leftover, unused or old medication can be dangerous to keep — it can fall into the hands of someone without your knowledge.

Since 2003, more overdose deaths have involved opioid painkillers than heroin and cocaine combined.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF ADDICTION?

Some of the signs that you or someone you know could be on the path to addiction include:

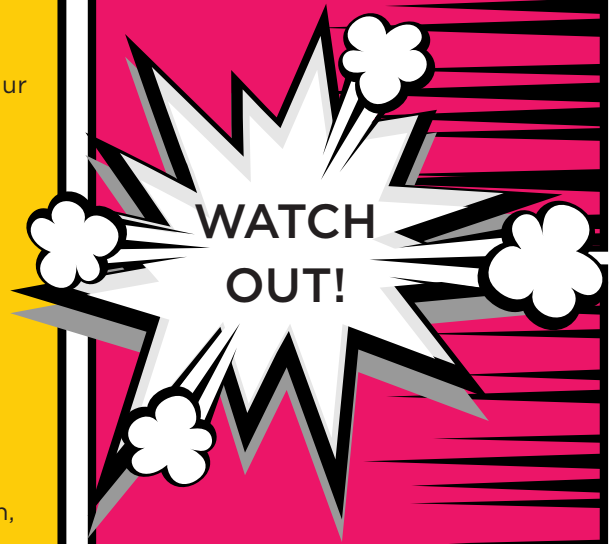
- » Thinking about taking more medicine than currently prescribed
- » Using painkillers when no longer needed for pain
- » Accessing more painkiller medication from another source beside your physician
- » Taking pain medicine not as prescribed (crushing, chewing, snorting, or injecting)

If any of these sound familiar, talk to your doctor.

Some of the factors that increase the risk of addiction include:

- » Personal or family history of substance abuse/addiction
- » Depression and anxiety
- » Long-term use of opioids

If addiction is present, you should be aware of the signs of an overdose: troubled breathing, sleepiness or stupor, weak muscles, cold and clammy skin, pinpoint pupils, slow heart rate and dangerously low blood pressure. If these symptoms occur, call 911. Move the person into the recovery position (on their side, head supported by their hand to open the airway, knee out to keep body from rolling onto stomach), and be prepared to administer CPR. Naloxone is a medication that can treat the effects of an overdose until help arrives.



HOW CAN YOU HELP PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS?



Safe storage: Keep your medication in a safe place away from children, pets or visitors. Consider installing a lock on your medicine cabinet – protect your opioids as you would a weapon.



Safe and timely disposal: Only use medications for as long as directed, then promptly dispose of them. Check your area for local take-back programs and events. Many pharmacies also offer mail-back programs. **DO NOT** flush drugs – this is illegal in many states and can pollute water supplies. Click [here](#) to learn more about safe disposal.



Don't mix: Using these medicines along with alcohol, sleeping pills or anxiety medications can increase respiratory depression, which can lead to unconsciousness, loss of breath and death. If you or a loved one are taking opioids, talk to your doctor or pharmacist to ensure you won't have any negative drug interactions.



Don't share: When someone you love is in pain, you want to help. But sharing your opioids is illegal and dangerous. Keep an inventory of your medications so you'll know if any have been taken.

