

# Prescription Opioids: Guideline Information for Patients



## Safer, More Effective Pain Management

Living with chronic pain can be challenging. It is essential that you and your doctor discuss treatment options with all of the risks and benefits carefully considered. Some medications, such as prescription opioids, can help relieve pain in the short term but also come with serious risks and potential complications—and must be prescribed and used carefully.

The [CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain](http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/guideline.html) (<http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/guideline.html>) helps inform providers' ability to offer safer, more effective pain management and supports clinical decision making about prescribing opioids.

## What are Opioids?

Opioids are natural or synthetic chemicals that reduce feelings of pain. Common prescription opioid pain relievers include:

- Hydrocodone (Vicodin)
- Oxycodone (OxyContin)
- Oxymorphone (Opana)
- Methadone
- Fentanyl

## Are opioids safe?

**Prescription opioids can help with some types of pain in the short term but have serious risks.** They can be an important part of treatment in some circumstances and can effectively relieve suffering for patients with active cancer or others in hospice or palliative care, but studies are not available to indicate whether opioids control chronic pain well when used long-term.

Before taking opioid medication for your chronic pain:

- Discuss pain treatment options, including ones that do not involve prescription drugs.
- Tell your doctor about past or current drug and alcohol use.
- Discuss all of the risks and benefits of taking prescription opioids.

- Living with chronic pain can be challenging. It is essential that you and your doctor discuss treatment options with all of the risks and benefits carefully considered.
- Some medications, such as prescription opioids, can help relieve pain in the short term but also come with serious risks and complications including unintentional overdose, death and addiction.
- Opioids are natural or synthetic chemicals that reduce feelings of pain.
- The use of prescription opioid pain relievers can have a number of side effects, even when taken as directed.

## What are the risk from opioids?

Patients taking prescription opioids are at risk for unintentional overdose or death and can become addicted. From 1999 to 2014, more than 165,000 persons died from overdose related to prescription opioids in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Up to 1 out of 4 people receiving long-term opioid therapy in a primary care setting struggles with addiction.<sup>2,3,4</sup>



Wheeler

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**In addition to the serious risks of addiction and overdose, the use of prescription opioid pain relievers can have a number of side effects, even when taken as directed:**

- Tolerance—meaning you might need to take more of the medication for the same pain relief
- Physical dependence—meaning you have symptoms of withdrawal when the medication is stopped
- Increased sensitivity to pain
- Constipation
- Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth
- Sleepiness and dizziness
- Confusion
- Depression
- Low levels of testosterone that can result in lower sex drive, energy, and strength
- Itching and sweating

Remember, your doctor is a partner in your pain treatment plan. It's important to talk about any and all side effects and concerns to make sure you're getting the safest and most effective care.

## Connecticut Resources

Department of Mental Health  
and Addiction Services  
[www.ct.gov/dmhas](http://www.ct.gov/dmhas)

Department of  
Consumer Protection  
Prescription Monitoring  
Program  
[www.ct.gov/dcp/pmp](http://www.ct.gov/dcp/pmp)

## National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental  
Health Services Administration  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)  
1.800.662.HELP (4357)

National Institute on  
Drug Abuse  
[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

## ALERT

### How to use Naloxone (Narcan) to Reverse an Opioid Overdose

[www.ctclearinghouse.org/Topics/Custom-Files/Reversing\\_An\\_Opioid\\_Overdose\\_With\\_Narcan.pdf](http://www.ctclearinghouse.org/Topics/Custom-Files/Reversing_An_Opioid_Overdose_With_Narcan.pdf)

#### References

1.CDC WONDERS

2.Banta-Green CJ, Merrill JO, Doyle SR, Boudreau DM, Calsyn DA. Opioid use behaviors, mental health and pain—development of a typology of chronic pain patients. *Drug Alcohol Depend* 2009;104:34–42.

3.Boscarino JA, Rukstalis M, Hoffman SN, et al. Risk factors for drug dependence among out-patients on opioid therapy in a large US health-care system. *Addiction* 2010;105:1776–82.

4.Fleming MF, Balousek SL, Klessig CL, Mundt MP, Brown DD. Substance use disorders in a primary care sample receiving daily opioid therapy. *J Pain* 2007;8:573–82.

