



Parenting for Prevention: Opioids

About Opioids

- Medications referred to as *opioids* are substances derived from the Asian poppy plant. The most common opioids are morphine and codeine, from which a number of additional opioids can be synthesized.
- When administered outside of a hospital setting, opioids are pills typically prescribed for severe pain (e.g. after surgery), chronic pain (e.g. severe back pain), persistent cough or diarrhea.
- We all have naturally occurring opioids in our bodies (e.g. endorphins) which act at opioid receptors in the brain, spinal cord, gastrointestinal tract, as well as other organs.
- When taken as medications, opioids act at these receptors to produce a number of different effects, including decreased perception of pain.
- Opioids also affect parts of the brain involved in hedonia (i.e. feelings of pleasure). The euphoric effects of opioids, which are often described as feelings of well-being, happiness, or joy, can over time, lead to psychological dependence or addiction.
- When taken as prescribed, opioids can be safe and effective. If properly managed, short-term medical use of opioids rarely causes addiction.
- Taking opioids for non-medical reasons (i.e. using drugs without a prescription or using them solely for the "high" they produce) increases the risk of addiction.
- At higher doses opioids can decrease activity in the area of the brain that regulates breathing, resulting in decreased respiration which can lead to overdose death.
- Common names for opioid medications include hydrocodone (Vicodin®), oxycodone (OxyContin®, Percocet®), morphine (Kadian®, Avinza®), and codeine.
- Common slang terms for opioids include oxy, percs, happy pills, hillbilly heroin, OC, or vikes.

Fast Facts

TOLERANCE

Tolerance occurs when a person no longer responds to the drug and a higher dose is needed to achieve the same effect. Tolerance is often associated with physical dependence.

DEPENDENCE

Dependence occurs because of normal adaptations to chronic exposure to a drug. A person dependent on opioids functions normally only when using the drug. When use of the drug is abruptly reduced or stopped the person is likely to experience withdrawal symptoms.

ADDICTION

Addiction is a disease that affects the brain and behavior. Addiction is when a person engages in compulsive drug seeking behaviors, even when faced with negative consequences. The behaviors are reinforcing or rewarding, thus manifesting in a loss of control in limiting the intake of the addictive drug.

What Parents Need to Know

Do you know what's inside your medicine cabinet? Do you keep track of your family members' use of prescription painkiller medications? Do you properly dispose of old or unused medications?

About **12 million American teens and adults** reported using prescription painkillers to get "high" or for other nonmedical reasons. According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2011, of the 41,340 drug overdose deaths in the United States, 22,810 (55%) were related to pharmaceuticals. Of the 22,810 deaths relating to pharmaceutical overdoses, **16,917 (74%) involved opioids**.

Teen opioid abuse can take many forms. The most common ways teens abuse opioids is by taking more of the pills than prescribed (either of their own or someone else's prescription) or by taking the drugs by a method other than prescribed (such as crushing up the pills into a powder, and snorting.) Both of these manners of abuse lead to greater risk of addiction and overdose.

One of the most effective ways of preventing teen opioid abuse is to cut off access within your own home. Most teens who abuse opioids get them for free from a friend or relative, or from the family medicine cabinet. Refer to our resources on the back page to learn more about locking up your prescription medications and other actions you can take to help prevent teen opioid abuse. The Ashland Police Station has a permanent Drug Drop Box for residents to properly dispose of expired/unused prescription medications. Many communities sponsor Drug Take Back Days twice a year to encourage proper disposal of prescription medications. Check here for dates: http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/.

Risks of Opioid Use

Even when taken as prescribed by a doctor, opioids carry certain risks. When prescription opioids are abused (taking *someone else's* prescription opioid medication, taking a prescription opioid medication *in a way other than prescribed* or taking the opioid prescription *to get high*) the risks can be severe and even cause death.

- Dry Mouth
- Constipation
- Sedation/sleepiness
- Confusion
- Nausea
- Central sleep apnea
- Respiratory (breathing) problems
- Tolerance
- Dependence
- Experimentation with heroin
- Accidental overdose/death
- When used with alcohol a dangerous slowing of heart rate and respiration, coma, or death may occur



FOR PARENTS

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/overdose/index.html>

Lock the Cabinet
<http://www.lockthecabinet.com/>

National Institute on Drug Abuse
<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-over-counter-medications>

National Institute on Drug Abuse
<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-are-opioids>

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids
<http://www.drugfree.org/drug-guide/prescription-pain-relievers/>

The Medicine Abuse Project
<http://medicineabuseproject.org/>

FOR TEENS

NIDA for Teens
<http://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-pain-medications-opioids>

Prevention Tips: How to Take Action

Talking about the risks of opioid use and taking action to prevent opioid abuse is crucial.

- Teach your children that it is only OK to take medicine that is prescribed by a doctor and given by a parent or caregiver.
- If your child is prescribed an opioid for a medical purpose by a doctor, monitor the dosage being taken. Keep the prescription locked in a secure place.
- Monitor the Over the Counter (OTC) medications that your teen may be using to relieve headaches, pain or soreness from sports, or minor colds.
- Talk with your children about how using drugs can interfere with their health, school, sports, activities, and their dreams.
- Tell your children to never accept pills, liquids or any other medications from a friend or classmate. Teach them how to refuse drugs if offered.
- Keep all prescription medications locked and secure in a safe place, in their original containers and properly dispose of old medications when expired.
- Let them know that they can come to you with any questions or concerns and that their well-being is the most important thing.