

Fact Sheet

OPIOIDS

What Are Opioids?



Opioids are a broad class of highly addictive pain-relieving drugs that function by attaching to opioid receptors on brain cells—dulling the perception of pain and boosting sensations of pleasure.

Types of Opioids/Opioid Dosage Forms

Commonly encountered illegal forms of opioids include:

- Heroin
- Synthetic opioids (fentanyl)

Commonly encountered prescription forms of opioids include:

- Oxycodone (oxycontin)
- Hydrocodone (Vicodin)
- Codeine
- Morphine
- Tramadol

What Are The Side Effects of Opioids?

Complications associated with the use of opioids include:

- Heroin
- Synthetic opioids (fentanyl)
- Sedation
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting

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What Are The Side Effects of Opioids? (continued)

- Constipation
- Physical dependence
- Tolerance
- Respiratory depression
- Uncontrollable cravings
- Weight loss
- Frequent flu-like symptoms
- Decreased libido
- Lack of hygiene
- Isolation from family and friends

Opioid Withdrawal Symptoms

- Nausea
- Sweating or chills
- Craving
- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Tachycardia
- Diaphoresis

Care Instructions for Opioid Withdrawal

The following actions may help mitigate the effects of opioid withdrawal:

- Call 911 if you think you are having a medical emergency
- Get plenty of rest and fluids
- Stay active
- Eat healthily
- Do not take illegal drugs or consume alcohol
- Talk to your doctor about drug treatment programs

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Signs of Opioid Overdose

- Pale face
- Clammy to the touch
- Limp body
- Blue/purple-hued fingernails/lips
- Vomiting and gurgling noises
- Lack of consciousness/ability to speak
- Slow/pausing of breathing or heartbeat

How To Respond To An Overdose

According to the CDC, the following measures should be taken if there is a subject opioid overdose:

- Call 911 for emergency medical intervention
- Administer naloxone as per the manufacturer's instructions for safe use. **Note: it may take up to five minutes for the overdose reversal to occur. If the individual is still unresponsive after two to three minutes after the initial administration, then a second dose should be given**
- Start other life-saving emergency interventions if trained to do so while waiting for emergency services if necessary
- Monitor the individual suspected of overdosing for any changes in condition

Opioid Statistics

According to the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, **“an estimated 10.1 million people aged 12 or older misused opioids in the past year.”** Of the 10.1 million people, 9.7 million people misused prescription pain relievers and 745,000 misused heroin.

Treatment for Addiction

There is no immediate reversal of opioid addiction. Treatment for an opioid addiction commonly follows two steps. Individuals are treated with effective medications like buprenorphine, and methadone “essential medicines.” Along with these medications, individuals should participate in behavior counseling, known as Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT).

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Prevention of Opioid Misuse and Overdose

Steps to avoid opioid misuse and dependence on opioids include:

- Call 911 for emergency medical intervention
- Work with your doctor to establish a responsible plan for pain management
- Know your options for pain management beyond the use of opioids to make informed decisions with your medical team
- Never take prescription opioids for in greater amounts or more often than prescribed
- Avoid combining the use of opioids with other drugs such as:
 - Benzodiazepines
 - Muscle relaxants
 - Hypnotics
- Other prescription or illicitly manufactured opioids
- Do not share or sell your prescription opioids
- Store opioids in a secure location, out of reach of others
- Follow the guidance of the Food and Drug Administration for proper disposal of opioids
- Consider carrying naloxone (available in all 50 states at local pharmacies)
- Educate others on the consequences of opioid use

Toolkit

SAMHSA's National Helpline- free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

Maryland Office of Treatment Services: an integrated system of behavioral health treatment and services that are available and accessible to individuals experiencing substance-related disorders. Includes clinical services, outpatient mental health centers, individual practitioners, group practice, partial hospitalization programs, and more.

<https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Pages/Treatment-and-Recovery-Services-Unit.aspx>

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Narcotics Anonymous and the SMART: program offers support groups and programs for those with substance use disorders and their families.

<https://www.na.org/meetingsearch/> <https://www.smartrecovery.org>

Resources and Research

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/prescription-drug-abuse/expert-answers/what-are-opioids/faq-20381270>

<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidsandopioidusedisorderoud.html>

<https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/prevention/index.html>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18443635/>

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/opioids/signs-of-opioid-abuse.html>

<https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/statistics/index.html>

<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/effective-treatments-opioid-addiction>

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