

Opioids

What You Need to Know

Prescription opioids can be used to help relieve moderate-to-severe pain and are often prescribed following surgery or injury or for certain health conditions. While these medications can be an important part of treatment, they also come with serious risks. Work with your healthcare provider to ensure you get the safest, most effective care.

Risks and Side Effects

Prescription opioids carry serious risks of addiction and overdose, especially with prolonged use. Even when taken as directed, the use of opioids can cause a number of negative and potentially dangerous side effects:

- **Tolerance** - Needing more of the medication to get the same pain relief
- **Physical dependence** - Experiencing symptoms of withdrawal when medication is stopped
- **Increased sensitivity to pain**
- **Constipation**
- **Sleepiness and dizziness**
- **Confusion**
- **Depression**
- **Low testosterone levels**, resulting in lower sex drive, energy, and strength
- **Itching and sweating**

Contributing Factors

Certain factors increase risk of opioid side effects:

- **History of substance abuse/misuse or overdose**
- **Certain mental health conditions**, such as depression or anxiety
- **Sleep apnea**
- **Older age (65+)**
- **Pregnancy**

Things to Avoid

Certain substances should be avoided when taking prescription opioids:

- **Alcohol**
- **Benzodiazepines** (Xanax, Valium)
- **Muscle relaxants** (Soma, Flexeril)
- **Hypnotics** (Ambien, Lunesta)
- **Other opioids**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)