

Your health care provider may advise treating side effects with other medications. Most of the side effects also can be minimized by lowering doses or discontinuing the medication. If you are taking other medication that cause symptoms similar to opioids, your risk for side effects is greater. *Always keep your health care provider informed of all medications that you are taking.*

FACT: LONG-TERM USE OF OPIOIDS CAN CAUSE PAIN.

A greater than normal sensitivity to pain, called opioid induced hyperalgesia, can result from long term use of opioids. Often the sensitivity will extend beyond the initial site of pain to a wider area of the body. To date, no one knows with certainty, how much opioid or how long the length of treatment must be before hyperalgesia occurs.

Opioids may also reinforce fear and avoidance of pain. The daily use of opioid may become a subtle yet constant reminder that you are vulnerable to pain and must rely on something outside yourself to cope with it.

Fact: If one pill helps, two are not necessarily better. Opioids can kill.

We all need oxygen to stay alive. The respiratory center of the brain tells the body to take an adequate amount of breathes each minute to keep us alive. Too much opioids (overdose) can cause slow down the message to breathe. Without enough oxygen, the other major organs of the body stop working and death occurs.

Symptoms of overdose

- Acting confused, such as not knowing people or places that would normally be familiar.
- A respiration rate of less than 12 breaths per minute
- Acting drowsy and having trouble staying awake
- Asking just to be allowed to go to sleep
- Strange behavior or sudden mood shifts
- Acting as if nothing mattered anymore
- Moving slowly if at all
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Small, pinpoint pupils

In case of overdose, call 911.

LIVING HEALTHY WITH CHRONIC PAIN



OPIOIDS & CHRONIC PAIN

little known facts



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OPIOIDS & CHRONIC PAIN

LITTLE KNOWN FACTS

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What are Opioids?

Opioids, also called narcotics, are a group of morphine-like drugs that include narcotic pain pills and pain patches. Opioids are regarded as the most effective medications for the treatment of severe pain. The regular use of opioids for chronic pain is controversial. It may surprise you to know that recent research suggests that opioid treatment rarely decreases pain more than 50% over the first year of use and after the 1st year the reduction in pain is only about 30%.

FACT: OPIOIDS WORK ON THE BRAIN, NOT THE SOURCE OF PAIN.

Opioid pain medications interfere with the transmission of pain messages to the brain from the part of the body that hurts. They do not heal or repair the source of pain. Opioids may also work in the brain to change the way you feel about the pain. When used to treat acute pain, such as occurs with infection, fractures or after surgery, opioids can provide comfort while the body heals.

FACT: LONGER TREATMENT CAN LEAD TO LESS EFFECTIVENESS.

Regular use of opioids can lead to tolerance. Tolerance means that a steady dose of opioid fails to provide the same relief as it originally did. Tolerance can result in the need for ever increasing doses of medication and increasing the risk of serious side effects. The risk of becoming tolerant to opioids increases with the length of treatment.

FACT: DEPENDENCE IS DIFFERENT FROM ABUSE AND ADDICTION.

Physical dependence occurs when the body becomes used to having a particular drug in the system. Physical dependence is an expected side effect of long term opioid use. When the medication is not present in the system, flu like symptoms such as sweating, yawning, body aches, restlessness, insomnia, nausea and diarrhea can occur. Withdrawal can be prevented or minimized by tapering off opioids rather than stopping the drug abruptly.

Opioid abuse means using medication in ways other than in the way prescribed by your healthcare provider. Taking more opioid than recommended, borrowing from friends, or using it to cope with life are symptoms of abuse.

Psychological Addiction (a brain related change) is a powerful urge to take opioids, even when you know that the medication can be harmful to your health or social well being. It has been estimated that two out of ten persons taking opioids will become addicted. Addiction often leads to deterioration of friendships and family relationships and poor work or school performance. Seeking opioids from multiple healthcare providers and frequent emergency room visits for pain related symptoms may can be symptoms of addiction. Other symptoms of include:

- withdrawal symptoms
- taking frequent or dangerously high doses of medication
- difficulty carrying out daily activities without the drug
- willingness to lie, steal or engage in other illegal activities to obtain opioids

Taking medication only under the supervision of your healthcare provider and in the way it is prescribed is the best way to decrease your risk of addiction. It is important to remember that treatment for addiction is available.

FACT: CHRONIC OPIOID TREATMENT MAY WORSEN FUNCTION AND QUALITY OF LIFE: SIDE EFFECTS

The ability to work and perform normal daily activity and quality of are considered the most important outcomes of chronic opioid therapy by many clinicians. Unfortunately, the evidence is that regular use of opioid improves function is very limited. Even with proper management, opioids can cause unwanted side effects that interfere with keeping a normal routine.

Where	What
Brain function	<p>Nausea and vomiting are the most common side effects of opioid treatment. These symptoms result from stimulation by opioids of the area (vestibular system) of the brain that detects chemicals in the blood that do not belong.</p> <p>Daytime sleepiness is another frequent side effect. On the other hand, opioids can cause or worsen insomnia by interfering with deep (REM) sleep.</p> <p>Other brain-related side effects include: changes in mood, nervousness, a heightened feeling of excitement, confusion, bad dreams and hallucinations. Opioids can make depression worse, particularly with long term use.</p>
Elimination	<p>Many people treated with opioids will experience constipation due to the slowing effect of opioids on the intestinal tract. If left untreated, constipation can result in an obstruction of the bowel, a medical emergency sometimes requiring surgery. Difficulty with urination can also be a side effect of opioid medications.</p>
Sexual function and reproduction	<p>Opioids affect the production of testosterone in men and estrogen in women. Low testosterone levels can lead to erectile dysfunction and low sperm count.</p> <p>Low estrogen can cause menstrual irregularities and interfere with the ability to become pregnant. Estrogen deficiency is a risk factor for bone loss, also known as osteoporosis.</p>
Immune system	<p>Regular use of opioids can interfere with cells that fight infection, resulting in poor healing.</p>