

# What You Need to Know About Opioid Pain Medicines

**This guide is for you!** Keep this guide and the Medication Guide that comes with your medicine so you understand all you need to know about your opioid pain medicine. Go over this information with your healthcare provider. Then, ask your healthcare provider about anything that you do not understand.

## What are opioids?

Opioids are strong prescription pain medicines that are also known as narcotics.

## What are the serious risks of using opioids?

- Opioids have serious risks of addiction and overdose
- **Too much opioid medicine in your body can cause your breathing to stop – which could lead to death.** This risk is higher for people taking other medicines that make you feel sleepy, or people with sleep apnea.
- **Addiction** is when you crave opioids because they make you feel good in some way; even though you know it is not good to keep taking them. Addiction is a complex medical condition that requires specific treatment.

### Risk Factors for Opioid Abuse:

- you have a history of addiction
  - family history of addiction
  - comorbid psychiatric illness (mental health problems)
  - use psychotropics (medicines to treat mental health problems)
  - under the age of 65
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- You can get addicted to opioids even though you take them exactly as prescribed, especially if taken for a long time.
  - If you think you might be addicted, talk to your healthcare provider right away.
  - If you need opioids for more than a few days, your body becomes “tolerant.” That means you must taper off the opioid medicine (slowly take less medicine) when you no longer needed it to avoid withdrawal symptoms. **Tolerance** is not addiction. Tolerance is a physical effect that can be treated by slowing taking less medicine.

## How can I take opioid pain medicine safely?

- Tell your healthcare provider about **all** the medicines you are taking, including vitamins, herbal supplements, and other over-the-counter medicines.
- Read the Medication Guide that comes with your prescription opioid medicine.

- Take your opioid medicine exactly as prescribed.
- Do not cut, break, chew, crush or dissolve your medicine. If you cannot swallow your medicine whole, talk to your healthcare provider.
- When your healthcare provider gives you the prescription, ask:
  - » How long should I take it?
  - » What should I do if I need to taper off the opioid medicine (slowly take less medicine)?
- Call your healthcare provider if the opioid medicine is not controlling your pain. Do not increase the dose on your own.
- Do not share or give your opioid medicine to anyone else. Your healthcare provider selected this opioid and the dose just for you. A dose that is okay for you could cause an overdose and death for someone else. Also, it is against the law.
- Store your opioid medicine in a safe place where it cannot be reached by children or stolen by family or visitors to your home. Many teenagers like to experiment with pain medicines. Use a lock-box to keep your opioid medicine safe. Keep track of the amount of medicine you have.
- Do not operate heavy machinery until you know how your opioid medicine affects you. Your opioid medicine can make you sleepy, dizzy, or lightheaded.



## What should I avoid taking while I am taking opioids?

Unless prescribed by your healthcare provider, you should avoid taking alcohol or these medicines with an opioid because it may cause you to stop breathing, which can lead to death:

- Alcohol: Do not drink any kind of alcohol while you are taking opioid medicines.
- Benzodiazepines (like Valium or Xanax)
- Muscle relaxants (like Soma or Flexeril)
- Sleep medicines (like Ambien or Lunesta)
- Other prescription opioid medicines

### What other options are there to help with my pain?

Opioids are not the only thing that can help you control your pain. Ask your healthcare provider if your pain might be helped with a non-opioid medication, physical therapy, exercise, rest, acupuncture, types of behavioral therapy, or patient self-help techniques.

### What is naloxone?

- Naloxone is a medicine that reverses respiratory depression (slowed or stopped breathing) resulting from taking too much opioid medicine.
- Use naloxone if you have it and call 911 or go to the emergency room right away if:
  - » You or someone else has taken an opioid medicine and is having trouble breathing, are short of breath, or are unusually sleepy.
  - » Someone else took an opioid medicine that was not prescribed for them.
  - » A child has accidentally taken the opioid medicine or you think they might have
    - ◊ Giving naloxone to a person who has not taken an opioid medicine will not hurt them.
- If you took extra opioid medicine, by mistake or to reduce pain, and are not having side effects but are uncertain about whether you should use naloxone, call 911 or go to the emergency room.

- **Remember:** Naloxone is never a substitute for emergency medical care. Always call 911 or go to the emergency room if you've used or given naloxone.

### Where can I get naloxone?

- There are some naloxone products that are designed for people to use in their home
- Naloxone is sold in pharmacies. Ask your healthcare provider for a naloxone prescription. In some states, you may not need a prescription.
- When you get your naloxone package from the pharmacy, read the instructions on how to use naloxone and ask the pharmacist if anything is unclear.
- Tell your family about your naloxone and keep it in a place where you or your family can get to it in an emergency.

**When you no longer need your opioid medicine, dispose of it as quickly as possible.**

- Flush it down the toilet. This will not hurt the environment.
- Take it to your community drug take back program.

### What things should I know about the specific opioid medicine that I am taking?

Your healthcare provider has prescribed Elevox for you. Read the Medication Guide for this medicine and remember this other important information:

**Dosing instructions:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Any specific interactions with your medicines:** \_\_\_\_\_

### What if I have more questions?

- Read the Medication Guide that comes with your opioid medicine prescription for more specific information about your medicine.
- Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist and ask them any questions you may have.
- Visit: <https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/InformationbyDrugClass/ucm337066.htm> for more information about opioid medicines.