

Opioids

Opioids are effective painkillers. Made from the opium poppy or synthetically produced, opioids can also make you feel intense pleasure. People who misuse or abuse these drugs can easily become addicted to them. Opioid medications include codeine, morphine, hydromorphone (Dilaudid®), oxycodone (OxyContin®), fentanyl (Duragesic®) and meperidene (Demerol®).

Heroin is also an opioid but is not used medically and cannot be legally purchased.

Some opioids, such as codeine and oxycodone, can be combined with drugs like Aspirin® (ASA) and Tylenol® (acetaminophen) to increase pain relief. Opioid medications can be taken in tablet form, injected, snorted or smoked.

Illegal possession, prescription shopping, and producing or trafficking in opioids can result in fines or prison sentences. Prescription shopping is getting prescriptions for opioids without telling the doctor you had another opioid prescription in the previous 30 days.

Effects of short-term use

- Besides pain relief and euphoria (intense pleasure), opioid drugs can cause nausea and vomiting, constipation, drowsiness, tiny pupils, blurred vision and poor night vision.
- Low doses of opioid drugs can impair your ability to drive.
- Higher doses can lower your heart rate, blood pressure and breathing. Very high doses can cause disorientation, convulsions, and hallucinations.
- Overdose can result in coma and death.
- Combining opioid drugs with other depressants like alcohol or tranquilizers is especially dangerous.

Effects of long-term use

- People who take opioid drugs for a long time can feel depressed, have difficulty concentrating and sleeping, and have sexual problems. Constipation can become a very serious problem.
- Long-term use of opioids with Aspirin can cause stomach bleeding. Long-term use of opioids with Tylenol can cause kidney and liver damage.

- When you take opioid drugs for a long time, your body stops making natural painkillers so even small pains seem severe when the drug leaves your body.
- Taking large doses for long periods can cause tremors and seizures.
- Abusing drugs, even medications, can cause legal problems, or serious problems with your job, schoolwork, relationships, finances, or spiritual life
- Young people who frequently abuse drugs may not learn how to solve problems, handle their emotions, and become mature, responsible adults.
- Babies born to women addicted to opioids often go through withdrawal after birth.

Opioids and addiction

If you use a lot of opioid painkillers, you may find that you need more and more to feel the same effects. You can become mentally and physically dependent, or addicted to how they make you feel.

Dependent users who quit using opioids get withdrawal symptoms like craving, runny nose, yawning, sweating, restless sleep, weakness, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle spasms, chills, irritability and pain. The worst symptoms pass within a few days, but it can take months to feel normal. It is best to stop using under supervised care.

If you have an addiction to alcohol or any other drug, you should only take opioids under medical supervision because they could make you relapse.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.