



Safety check: Opioid prescription painkillers

Opioid prescription painkillers are liberally prescribed – so much so that people believe they are the best way to treat pain. In fact, these drugs are highly addictive, have many risky side effects and are not always the most effective way to get pain relief.

If your doctor suggests taking opioid painkillers, be sure to tell him or her about any conditions that will increase your risk. Some of these include:

- Any personal or family history of addiction
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Sleep apnea
- Chronic constipation

Opioids can impact your day-to-day life

Doctors prescribe opioid painkillers so their patients can more easily manage pain. However, these drugs can significantly impact daily life and your ability to do necessary tasks.

Ask your doctor:

- If opioid painkillers will affect your ability to drive
- If you are safe to work while taking opioid painkillers

Protect your family

Though opioid painkiller abuse and addiction is most common among middle-aged adults, teens are using these drugs at higher rates now, too. Talk to your children about using prescription painkillers.

- Warn them that taking a drug without a prescription is just as risky as taking illegal drugs
- Discuss the dangers of mixing prescription drugs with alcohol
- Explain how painkillers are made from opioids, which is similar to heroin
- Talk to their grandparents about how to safely store their medications
- Secure painkillers in a locked drawer or container

Fast Stat:

Drug overdoses – largely from opioid prescription painkillers – are the leading cause of unintentional death for adults ages 25-64. **Every day, 44 people die** from prescription painkiller overdose. (*Injury Facts*®)

Green Cross Tip

If you must take prescription painkillers, ask your doctor for the smallest dosage possible for the shortest amount of time. You can become addicted to prescription painkillers in as few as five days.