



How to reduce your risk of overdosing from prescription painkillers

The two main groups of people at risk for prescription drug overdose are those who report long-term medical use of opioids and those who report nonmedical use (use without a prescription or medical need) in the past month.

Those at particularly high risk include persons:

- taking opioid painkillers for the first time;
- taking multiple forms of opioids or who mix them with alcohol, sleeping pills or anti-anxiety medications;
- with sleep apnea, heart failure, obesity, severe asthma or respiratory conditions

How to reduce your risk of overdose

A number of steps can be taken to reduce your risk of overdose:

- Discuss non-opioid alternatives with your doctor and if an opioid is still indicated, discuss taking the lowest dose possible for the shortest duration.
- Tell your doctor about all other medications and drugs you take and about how much alcohol you consume.
- Ask your doctor about how long the medicine will be in your body and whether and when you can drive.
- Do not use more of an opioid painkiller without talking to your doctor.
- Avoid mixing opioid drugs with alcohol, sleeping pills and anti-anxiety medications
- Obtain a prescription for naloxone or carry a naloxone overdose prevention kit if you or a family member is using a high daily dosage of opioids. Naloxone is a medication that can treat the effects of an opioid overdose until 911/medical help arrives.

What are the signs of and overdose?

Signs of overdose include slow and loud (or stopped) breathing; sleepiness progressing to stupor or coma; weak, floppy muscles; cold and clammy skin; pinpoint pupils; slow heart rate; dangerously low blood pressure and ultimately, death.

What you should do in the event of a suspected overdose

If you suspect someone may have overdosed, call 9-1-1 immediately. Although they may look as if they are sleeping, they may actually be unconscious. After calling 9-1-1, move the person into the recovery position and be prepared for CPR. If you or anyone around has naloxone, administer it immediately. Treating someone with naloxone will not harm them and it may mean the difference between life and death.

Naloxone is a medication that can treat the effects of an opioid overdose until 911/medical help arrives.

National Safety Council
1121 SPRING LAKE DRIVE
ITASCA, IL 60143-3201
(800) 621-7619
nsc.org

Baker D, Jenkins AJ. 2008. "A Comparison of Methadone, Oxycodone, and Hydrocodone Related Deaths in Northeast Ohio." *Journal of Analytical Toxicology* 32(2):165-71.
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2012. "CDC Grand Rounds: Prescription Drug Overdoses — A U.S. Epidemic." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 61(1):10-13.
Cherny, Nathan I. 1996. "Opioid Analgesics: Comparative Features and Prescribing Guidelines." *Drugs* 51(5):713-37.
Stephens E, Tarabar A. N.d. "Toxicity, Opioids." *Medscape Reference*. <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/815784-overview>. Last updated Nov. 19, 2010.
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2010. *Results From the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Vol. 1, Summary of National Findings*. Publication no. SMA 10-4586. Rockville, Md.: Office of Applied Statistics.
U.S.National Library of Medicine. Medline Plus. Health Topics: Naloxone Injection. Retrieved from <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/meds/a612022.html>