



# Questions to ask your physician

**Opioid-based pain medications prescribed by your doctor can be dangerous in a number of ways if not used exactly as directed. Dependence on or addiction to the medicine can occur, as can very dangerous overdose conditions, if you're not taking the medication in a way that your doctor has prescribed.**

**A small percent of people may become dependent even when taking the pain medication as prescribed.**

It is very important to discuss the risks and benefits of taking this medication with your physician. In order to get off to a safe start in taking your pain relief medication, it will help to ask your physician the following questions if his or her instructions do not include these points:

- Should I take the opioid medication on a regular schedule or only when I feel pain?
- What are the side effects of this opioid medication? What should I do if I experience nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, constipation, tremors or drug craving?
- Is this opioid medicine addictive? If so, how can I keep from getting addicted to the drug?
- What should I do if I notice that I need more and more of the drug to get the same effect?
- How would I know if I'm addicted to an opioid?

- What do you recommend that I do if I think I'm addicted to an opioid?
- When my pain has improved and it's time to stop taking the opioid medication, should I stop all at once or should I taper off the medicine in some way?
- What should I do if I suffer withdrawal symptoms after stopping use of the opioid?
- What are the alternatives to opioids to manage my pain?

Here are additional tips to be aware of when starting a course of prescription opioid-based pain medication:

- Keep your doctor informed. Tell your health care professional about all other medicines that you are currently taking. This includes prescription medications, over-the-counter drugs and herbal supplements.
- Do not change the dose of your pain relief medication without talking to your doctor first. Keep your doctor informed about how your pain is responding to the drug, and whether you're experiencing side effects of the medication.
- Don't ever share prescription pain medications with another person. Only a licensed health care professional can determine if a prescription pain medication is appropriate and safe for someone.
- Keep in mind that the dose of an opioid pain medication that is safe for you could be high enough to cause an overdose and death in someone else, especially a child.

So it's very important to store these medications in a place where they cannot be accidentally accessed or stolen.

- Your doctor may assist you in discontinuing the use of an opioid medication when you no longer need it for pain. This can include a tapered discontinuation, or weaning off of, the medication so that you don't suffer withdrawal symptoms. This gives your body time to adjust to the absence of the medication in your system.

## Additional resources

### **National Institute on Drug Abuse**

[www.drugabuse.gov/publications/researchreports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-areopioids](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/researchreports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-areopioids)

### **Family Doctor**

<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseasesconditions/opioid-addiction.html>

### **Drugfree.org**

[www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

## Contact Us

Your program provides access to tools and other resources online or call us directly to speak to a professional counselor who is available everyday and at any time to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.

*Sources: National Institute on Drug Abuse, familydoctor.org*

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