

What are opioids?

Opioids are a class of drugs that are legally prescribed by doctors to treat moderate to severe pain.

You may have heard the names of some of the more common opioids — oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), morphine and methadone. You also may have heard of Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid pain reliever that is approved to treat severe pain, typically in advanced cancer patients. According to the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, or DEA, fentanyl is so powerful it is 80 to 100 times more potent than morphine!¹



If injured, seek medical treatment or evaluation immediately to help ensure your best outcome!

Why might I or a loved one be prescribed opioids?

People might be given a prescription for an opioid following surgery, an injury or for a severe health condition.

In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the acceptance and use of prescription opioids for the treatment of chronic, non-cancer pain, such as back pain or osteoarthritis, despite serious risks and the lack of evidence about their long-term effectiveness.²

Why do I need to be cautious with prescription opioids?

Prescription opioids come with some serious risks and side effects including:

- misuse
- opioid use disorder
- addiction
- overdose
- death

Opioid misuse can lead to poor decision making, loss of friends and increased family stress. You could fall behind in class or lose your spot on a team, your job, scholarships and academic opportunities.

Opioids are a “gateway drug.”

Prescription opioid misuse could lead to users turning to illegal opioids, like heroin, after the person's prescription expires or is discontinued by their doctor.

Who's at risk for addiction?

Opioids are addictive regardless of risk factors, but some people might be at higher risk for addiction if they have any of the following:

- a family or personal history of alcohol, tobacco or substance misuse.
- a diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health condition, such as depression, anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.



Did you know?
You can refuse prescription medication if you do not want it.

Advocating for yourself and loved ones can go a long way toward avoiding serious risks and side effects of opioids.

What should I do if a doctor prescribes pain medication?

If pain management is prescribed by a doctor as part of a treatment plan, take precautions to ensure it's not misused.

- **Get educated.**
 - Ask if the medication being prescribed is an opioid.
 - Know the correct dosage and timing for taking the medication
 - Ask the healthcare provider how long he or she expects pain management to be part of the treatment plan.
 - Take the medication as prescribed and only when necessary.
 - Ask if the pain medication will react with any other medicines to avoid adverse reactions.
 - Store the medication properly.
 - Safely dispose of the medication when it is no longer needed.
- **Consider non-opioid pain relief such as physical therapy, massage, acupuncture or over-the-counter medications.**
- **Stay in contact with the doctors and other medical professionals involved in treatment and recovery.**
- **Involve teachers, coaches and other trusted adults or family members in the plan for a healthy recovery. They can help keep an eye out for unexpected changes that could indicate a problem with the medication.**
- **Have naloxone, also known as NARCAN® Nasal Spray, available to help counteract the life-threatening effects of an opioid overdose.**
 - Free naloxone is available at georgiaoverdoseprevention.org

Do you or someone you know need help?

If you or someone you know is experiencing opioid misuse or addiction, the best thing you can do is get help right away.

Georgia Crisis & Access Line
1-800-715-4225
mygcal.com

Do you have more questions?



Learn more about opioids, including misuse prevention and treatment options at gnrhealth.com/opioids.



gnrhealth.com

GNR Public Health works with community partners such as Guide Inc. in Gwinnett, Newton County Drug Free Community Coalition, and Rockdale Drug-Free Community Coalition to help keep our community healthy, protected and prepared!

To learn all the services the health department provides, please visit our website.



Sources

¹ Source: United States Drug Enforcement Administration.
www.dea.gov/factsheets/fentanyl.

² Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
www.cdc.gov/opioids/basics/prescribed.html.

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Let's Talk

Things everyone needs to know about prescription pain medication.

OPIOIDS