

Patient Education: Overview

Opioids

Patient's Name: _____

Date: _____

Your health care provider has talked with you about taking an opioid for your health condition. Here is more information to help you understand opioids and how the opioid you take might affect your body.

What is an opioid?

An opioid is a medicine given by a health care provider to help people who are in severe pain. Opioids are sometimes called narcotics, prescription pain pills or "narcos." Opioids help you to feel less pain. An opioid might not take away all of the pain.

You might see another health care provider to help know why you are having pain or help lessen your pain. An example of another provider is a physical therapist or neurologist.

Common opioid medicines are:

- Vicodin (hydrocodone)
- Lortab (hydrocodone)
- Dilaudid (hydromorphone)
- OxyContin (oxycodone)
- Percocet (oxycodone)
- Tylenol #3 (codeine)
- MS Contin (morphine)
- Duragesic (fentanyl)

Which opioid is best for me?

Your health care provider will choose an opioid that will help you feel less pain. Which medicine is chosen may depend on:

- Why you have pain
- Your health conditions
- Your allergies
- Medicines used before
- Insurance coverage
- Your current medicines

How much medicine you take will depend on why you need an opioid. People with the same health condition may take a different opioid or a different amount of the same opioid.

Call 911 or go to the nearest hospital immediately if you:

- Have chest pain
- Have trouble breathing
- Overdose
- Have a seizure
- Pass out
- Have sudden trouble seeing or hearing

Call your health care provider before your next visit if you:

- Feel side effects for more than one week
- Think you are addicted to your medication
- Think you are tolerant to your medication
- Are thinking about using other drugs

The opioid you will take is:

How long will I take my opioid?

How long you take an opioid depends on why you are taking it. Opioids are meant to be taken for a short period of time. Most people take them for one to three days to lessen pain. If you have had a surgery, you might take an opioid for up to one week.

You might have a serious health condition that causes severe pain. If so, you might take an opioid for a longer time. Your health care provider will check your pain level in one month. If the opioid is not helping your pain, you may need to stop taking it. You may or may not change to a different medication for your pain. Your health care provider will help you to know what is best for you.

How often will I need to see my health care provider?

Your health care provider will want to see you often while you are taking an opioid. This is to keep you safe and healthy. It helps your health care provider to know if the medicine is working. A visit also helps to check if you are having side effects or risks from your medicine. Your health care provider must also follow certain laws to keep you safe. To help keep you safe and healthy, your health care provider might ask you to:

- Sign a contract
- Take a urine or blood test
- Bring your pills to every visit

Your next visit is:

Your health care provider's phone number is:

See reverse for side effects and other risks.

For help finding substance abuse or mental health care in your area, please call **800-662-HELP (4357)**.

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Patient Education: Side Effects and Other Risks

Opioids

Your health care provider has talked with you about taking an opioid for your health condition. Taking an opioid can increase your chance of something unwanted happening. This is called a risk. Side effects are one type of risk. Some risks are more serious and can cause harm or injury. Here is more information to help you understand the serious risks of taking an opioid.

Risks of taking an opioid:

Breathing Problems

Opioids can make your breathing slow and shallow. It may be hard for your body to receive the oxygen it needs. This may cause brain damage or a coma.

Tolerance

Tolerance happens when your body gets used to the medicine you are taking. You might not feel like the medicine is helping you anymore. You might feel like you need more medicine to help you. Tolerance may lead to addiction.

Addiction

Addiction happens when you crave medicine even when your body does not need it. It can happen even if you have not been addicted before. Addiction may lead to overdose.

Overdose

Overdose happens when too much of one medication is in your body. It can also happen when you take many different medicines or someone else's medicine. Overdose may cause death.

Drug Use

Drugs like heroin are also opioids. Some people are tempted to take drugs like heroin to help with their pain. Taking heroin or other drugs to help your pain can be dangerous. Using other drugs may lead to overdose.

Side effects of taking an opioid:

When you take an opioid, it should help with your pain. It may also cause unwanted things to happen. These are called side effects. Not everyone feels side effects. Most side effects go away within one week. These are called short-term side effects. Some short-term side effects are:

- Feeling dizzy
- Feeling sleepy
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Trouble falling asleep
- Trouble concentrating

Some side effects do not go away while you are taking the medication. These are called long-term side effects. The most common long-term side effect is constipation. Other long-term side effects are depression, tolerance, and memory problems. Long-term side effects may or may not go away when you stop taking an opioid. Your health care provider will help you manage short-term and long-term side effects.

Taking an opioid safely:

It is important to take your medicine exactly how your health care provider told you to take it. Taking more medicine, different medicine, or someone else's medicine is unsafe.

Call your health care provider right away if you think you may be tolerant or addicted to your medicine, or if you are thinking about using other drugs.

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