

## What are opioids?

Opioids are pain medicines that are taken to relieve moderate to moderately severe pain. These medicines are sometimes needed for only a few days during recovery from an injury or surgery, but in some cases they may be taken for a longer period of time. Opioids are often used in combination with other pain relievers, such as aspirin or acetaminophen.

## Safety considerations

Opioids can be habit-forming and dangerous if they are abused. That's why you need to see your healthcare professional regularly if you take oral opioid medicines.

The following are some common side effects of opioids:

### ■ Constipation

You may experience constipation when taking an opioid medicine and may need a stimulant laxative to prevent or relieve this problem. Ask your healthcare provider for a list of appropriate laxatives. Drinking more water or taking a stool softener may also help.

### ■ Drowsiness

You may become drowsy when you use an opioid medicine. You should use caution while driving or operating machinery if you are taking an opioid medicine.

### ■ Confusion

Opioids may cause confusion, especially in elderly patients.

### ■ Other potential side effects

In some cases, an opioid medicine may cause nausea, vomiting, low blood pressure, itching, and difficulty urinating. Some opioids, such as morphine, can trigger or worsen asthma attacks.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you have troubling side effects from your opioid medicine. Possible solutions include adjusting your dosage, switching to a different medicine, or adding another drug to treat the side effect.

Tell your healthcare provider about your medical and family history. Also tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and nonprescription medicines.



### **Safety considerations (cont'd)**

#### ***Abuse***

Opioid medicines can be abused by people who use them for reasons other than pain relief. By law, your healthcare provider must help ensure that opioid medicines are not misused or given to people who should not have them. Here's how you can help:

- Take your prescription medicines exactly according to the instructions
- Always keep your appointments
- Never give your prescription medicines to anyone else, for any reason
- Do not take medicines other than those prescribed for you by your healthcare professional
- Keep your medicines locked up, away from children and from people who might be tempted to take them inappropriately

#### ***Tolerance, withdrawal, and addiction***

Over time, some people who have been taking opioid medicines find them less effective for pain relief and need a higher dose. This is known as tolerance. Additionally, after taking opioid medicine for a period of time, it can be difficult to suddenly stop taking it. The illness or discomfort that results is known as withdrawal. **If you find your drug is less effective or if you would like to stop taking it, it is important to get help from your healthcare professional rather than raising or lowering the dose on your own.**

It is also important to remember that neither tolerance nor withdrawal indicates addiction to opioid medicine. If you are concerned about tolerance, withdrawal, or addiction, talk to your healthcare professional.

#### **Tips for use**

- Do not drink alcoholic beverages when taking opioid medicines
- Do not take sleeping pills or tranquilizers without your healthcare provider's approval
- *If your pain comes back before it is time to take the next dose, contact your healthcare provider. He or she may want to adjust your dose or switch to another pain medicine*

It is important to follow the instructions for your specific brand of pain reliever. See the prescribing information for your specific opioid medicine for additional safety considerations.