

OPIOID FACT SHEET

Opioids are a class of drugs that are made naturally or synthetically from the opium poppy plant. Opioids bind to opioid receptors in your brain, which reduces your sensation of pain, and can increase feelings of pleasure. They can also produce side-effects, such as dizziness, sleepiness, poor balance, and difficulty concentrating. Opioid medications tend to be effective for pain-control with short-term use, after a major injury or medical procedure (like a surgery), but long-term use can result in a number of significant health problems.

Common opioids include:

1. Tylenol #3 (Codeine with Acetaminophen)
2. Codeine (only available in generic form)
3. Fentanyl (Actiq, Duragesic, Fentora, Abstral, Onsolis)
4. Hydrocodone (Hysingla, Zohydro ER)
5. Hydrocodone and acetaminophen (Lorcet, Lortab, Norco, Vicodin)
6. Hydromorphone (Dilaudid, Exalgo)
7. Meperidine (Demerol)
8. Methadone (Dolophine, Methadose)
9. Morphine (Kadian, MS Contin, Morphabond)
10. Oxycodone (OxyContin, Oxaydo)
11. Oxycodone and acetaminophen (Percocet, Roxicet)
12. Oxycodone and naloxone (Targin, Targiniq, Targinact)
13. Heroin

Tolerance: Tolerance can occur with long-term opioid use. This means that over time, you will need higher dosages of the drug to achieve the same effect. As a result, opioid medications can become less and less effective for pain-control the longer you use it.

Dependence: Long-term opioid use will very likely lead to dependence, which means that you will experience withdrawal symptoms if you suddenly stop taking the drug. Common withdrawal symptoms include nausea, diarrhea, runny nose, muscle aches, anxiety, agitation, moodiness, cravings, elevated heart rate and blood pressure, and trouble sleeping.

Addiction: Some people who take opioids become addicted to them. Addiction implies that you feel a craving or compulsion to use the drug, even when it results in negative consequences (like being unable to fulfill work and family obligations). Other signs of addiction include: spending a lot of time thinking about getting the drug and using the drug, being very worried about running out of the drug, taking more of the drug than is prescribed, and failing in attempts to stop using the drug. Some people are more prone to addiction than others.

Potential side effects of long-term opioid use include sedation, drowsiness, decreased concentration & memory, mood changes, emotional numbness, constipation, dry mouth, abdominal pain, nausea, weakened bones, and hormonal changes (which can result in sexual dysfunction, infertility, and insulin resistance). Long-term opioid use is also associated with greater risk of heart attacks, falls and broken bones, sleep apnea, and immune system suppression. Finally, opioid-induced hyperalgesia can develop over time, which means that the opioids can actually make you more pain-sensitive.

Opioid overdose: There are 3 key symptoms to look for - slowed or stopped breathing, unconsciousness/non-responsiveness, and pinpoint pupils. Additional symptoms include cold/clammy skin, blue lips and nails, and choking, gurgling, or snoring sounds. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 78,000 people in the United States died of an opioid over-dose in a 12-month period between 2020 and 2021.