

OPIOID PAIN MEDICATION SAFETY

What is an opioid?

An opioid is a strong pain medication that is only available by prescription for moderate to severe pain. Most patients only use opioids for short periods, so talk with your provider about how long they expect you to need this medication. Opioids do not work for everyone and can sometimes lead to increased pain over time if taken long-term. Most patients do not get full relief of their pain from opioid medications alone. Therefore it is best to use opioids in combination with other non-opioid pain medications and other non-medication therapies (e.g., physical therapy, yoga, ice, heat, etc.). The goal is to help reduce your pain to a tolerable level, keep you moving, and help you heal.

If you received a prescription for an opioid pain medication, you have been advised of the benefits and risks. Opioid pain medications can be addictive and may lead to overdose and death. You may also receive a prescription for naloxone, also known as Narcan, with your opioid prescription for use in case of emergency.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS & RISKS OF OPIOID USE?

Short-Term Side Effects:

- Nausea (very common) or vomiting
- Constipation
- Itching
- Headache
- Dizziness – do not drive or operate machinery
- Drowsiness

Tip! Take a laxative/stool softener at least once or twice a day when taking opioids.

Serious Risks:

- Misuse, abuse and addiction: Risk increases the longer you take them.
- Overdose: Taking too much of your opioid.
- Death: Results from respiratory depression (slowed breathing) from opioid overdose.

Proper Use of Opioid Medication:

- Only take your opioid medication as prescribed.
- Do not break or crush opioid medications unless your doctor or pharmacist instructs you to do so.
- Never share your opioid medications.
- Opioids should be used in combination with non-opioid medications (e.g., acetaminophen, ibuprofen) and therapies (e.g., acupuncture, physical therapy).

PROPER STORAGE OF OPIOIDS



Opioid medications should be stored **out of reach of children** and in a safe place, **preferably locked**, to prevent other family members and visitors from having access to these medications.



If opioids are intentionally or unintentionally shared with others for whom they are not prescribed, **they may experience overdose** at the same or at a lower dosage than what is prescribed for you.

PROPER DISPOSAL OF OPIOIDS

Opioid disposal services are available at the following locations:

- UC Medical Center Hoxworth Pharmacy
- UC Medical Center Hospital Lobby
- UC Health Clifton Physician's Office Building Outpatient Pharmacy



You can also use Google Maps to search “drug drop-off near me” or “medication disposal” to find locations near you, or search for a location on the DEA’s website, (dea.gov).

Drug take-back services may also be available through your local fire and/or police departments and other pharmacy locations.

OVERDOSE RECOGNITION AND RESPONSE

Patient Education

RISK FACTORS FOR OVERDOSE

- Mixing drugs together. For example: opioids + benzos (e.g., Valium, Xanax) and/or alcohol
- Using opioids again after a period of abstinence
- Poor physical health, especially breathing problems, liver or kidney problems and HIV
- Previous overdose

STRATEGIES TO PREVENT OVERDOSE

- Avoid mixing opioids with other drugs, including alcohol and/or benzodiazepines (e.g., Valium, Xanax), because these substances, like opioids, impact your ability to breathe.
- If you are using opioids after a period of abstinence, use at a lower dose.
- To prevent an overdose, teach your family and friends how to recognize and respond to an overdose.

HOW DO I KNOW IF SOMEONE IS OVERDOSING?

- Slow breathing (less than one breath every five seconds) or no breathing
- Vomiting
- Face is pale and clammy
- Blue lips, fingernails or toenails
- Slow, erratic or no pulse
- Snoring or gurgling noises while asleep or nodding out
- No response when you yell the person's name or rub the middle of their chest with your knuckles

WHAT IS NALOXONE?

Naloxone (Narcan[®]) is a prescription medication that can reverse an overdose that is caused by an opioid drug. When administered during an overdose, it blocks the effects of opioids on the brain and restores breathing. Naloxone has no potential for abuse. If administered to a person who is not experiencing an opioid overdose, it is harmless. If administered to a person who is experiencing an opioid overdose, it will produce withdrawal symptoms. Naloxone does not reverse overdoses from non-opioid drugs.

You can pick up naloxone at any outpatient pharmacy by simply talking with your pharmacist. Most insurances will cover the cost of naloxone, but if you do not have insurance or if your insurance doesn't cover the cost of naloxone you can receive naloxone for free by texting "NARCAN" to 22999 or by using the QR code below.



HOW TO RESPOND TO AN OVERDOSE

1. Try to wake the person by yelling their name and rubbing the middle of their chest with your knuckles (sternum rub).
2. Call 9-1-1. Indicate the person has stopped breathing or is struggling to breathe.
3. Make sure nothing is in the person's mouth that could be blocking their breathing. If breathing has stopped or is very slow, perform rescue breathing by tilting their head back, lifting their chin and pinching their nose shut, then giving one slow breath every five seconds, blowing enough air for their chest to rise.
4. Use naloxone and continue rescue breathing.
5. If the person begins to breathe on their own, put them on their side so they do not choke on their vomit. Continue to monitor their breathing and perform rescue breathing if respirations are below 10 breaths per minute.
6. Stay with the person until EMS arrives.



HOW TO ADMINISTER NALOXONE NASAL SPRAY

Peel back packaging to remove device.



Place nozzle in the nostril until your fingers touch the bottom of the person's nose.



Press the plunger firmly.



If no response after two to three minutes, repeat in other nostril with the second spray device.