

Prescription Pain Medicine Guide for Teens

How to safely use prescription opioid medicines to treat your pain

In this guide, you will learn:

- What to ask your doctor about your medicine
- How to take prescription pain medicine safely
- How to keep from getting addicted
- What to do if you have side effects from opioids



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What are Opioids?

Opioids are strong pain medicines you can only get by getting a prescription from your doctor. They include hydrocodone, morphine, oxycodone, and hydromorphone.

Doctors often prescribe them after you have had surgery or get hurt in certain ways. They work by keeping pain messages from getting to your brain.

Some people do not take these medicines as their doctor tells them. This has caused problems all across the country. Hundreds of people die from opioid overdoses every day, and millions are addicted.

You **can** take prescribed drugs safely. Read the information below, follow the opioid safety checklist, and work with your caregiver and doctor to follow a pain management plan.

How can I take opioids safely?

My Opioid Safety Checklist

- Take opioid medicine exactly as your doctor tells you. Never take more of the medicine than you are told. Never take it more often than you are told. If you take too much of an opioid, it can cause overdose or death.
- Do not take any other medicines unless you, your parent, or your caregiver check with your doctor or pharmacist first.
- Do not drink alcohol or take medicines that have alcohol while you are taking the opioid medicine. Some cold medicines have alcohol in them, so always read the label. Mixing alcohol and opioids can cause serious health problems, even death.
- Do not drive, ride a bike, or operate machines while taking your medicine because the medicine can make you sleepy.
- Do not take opioid medicine if you are or may be pregnant. It can cause serious problems with your baby.
- Do not share your medicines with anyone.
- Have a parent or caregiver:
 - Store the opioids in a locked cabinet away from children, friends, and visitors.
 - Keep track of how much medicine is in the container so they know if someone else is taking the medicine.
 - Safely get rid of any leftover opioids as soon as you no longer need them.

What are the risks of taking opioid pain medicines?

Your pain medicine is very strong. When you have been on them for a short time, you might feel:

- A little sleepy
- Sick to your stomach (nausea)
- Itchy
- That it is hard to go to the bathroom (hard to poop)

These happen a lot, so you should not be scared if they do.

If you have to take pain medicine for a longer time, you might also feel:

- You need more medicine for the same pain relief (your body builds up “tolerance” for it)
- You get sick when you stop taking the medicine (your body gets “dependent” on the medicine)
- You want the medicine even when you do not need it (your body gets “addicted” to the medicine)

Tell your parents or caregivers if you feel any of these. If you get addicted to opioids, you will feel like you want more even when you do not need them. This can cause you to try dangerous things, like:

- Lying to your doctor to get a new prescription
- Getting opioids from a friend
- Stealing opioids from friends or family
- Buying and using street drugs



Should I be scared that I might get addicted to opioids?

Most people who take opioid medicine as they are told for a short time do not get addicted. For example, if you have your wisdom teeth taken out and take an opioid as your doctor tells you, you probably will not get addicted.

But, you can get addicted if you:

- Take more of the medicine than you are told to take
- Take the medicine for longer than you are told
- Take someone else's opioids (you may not know how much medicine is in their pills)

You can also get others addicted by not getting rid of your opioids as you are told:

- Sharing this medicine with others puts them at risk for addiction or overdose.
- Sharing your opioid medicine with someone else is also a felony crime punishable with jail time for both you and the person you are sharing it with.

Bottom Line: Do not share your medicine with anyone or take someone else's medicine.

What should I ask my doctor about opioids?

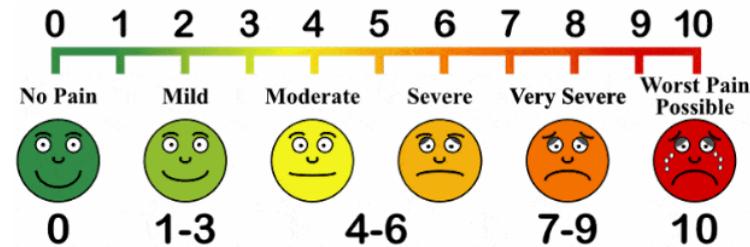
Before going to the doctor, let your parent or caregiver know if you have any questions about taking opioids or other pain medicines.

Some common questions teens have about taking pain medicine are:

- How are the medicines supposed to help me?
- How much and for how long should I take each medicine?
- What side effects could I have?
- When can I switch to non-prescription pain medicine like ibuprofen or acetaminophen?
- Should I take this medicine on an empty stomach or with food?
- What activities (such as driving), foods, drinks or other medicines should I avoid when I take this medicine?

How can I keep track of my pain?

Before you take your medicine, check where your pain level is. Use this chart, and tell your parents or caregiver how much pain you feel:



2 hours after you took your medicine, check your pain again. If your pain is a 5 or more, tell your parents or caregiver. They will call your doctor.

Stop and call!

You or your parents or caregiver should call 911 right away if you:

- Cannot get your breath (gasping for air, wheezing)
- Have a hard time swallowing
- Have a hard time waking up after taking medicine

This could be a reaction to your medicine that you need special help for.

Tell your parent or caregiver if you feel:

- Hyper (hopped up, wired, more active than normal)
- Scared
- Extra sleepy

Do you or someone you know have an opioid, alcohol, or other drug problem?

Call SAMHSA's free and confidential National Helpline at **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** to find out where you can get help in your area.

Where can I learn more about opioids?

BeMedWise Program at NeedyMeds. Use Pain Meds Safely. <https://bemedwise.org/medication-safety/pain-management-medications>

National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2019) Prescription Opioids. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-opioids>

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