

# Understanding OPIOID Pain Medications

## Information for Mature Adults and Family Caregivers



- Codeine
- Fentanyl
- Hydrocodone
- Acetaminophen
- Hydromorphone



**UAMS**

Donald W. Reynolds  
Institute on Aging

**AR KANSAS**  
**DEPARTMENT OF**  
**HUMAN**  
**SERVICES**



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## WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are a group of pain medications used to help with moderate to severe pain. Prescription opioids, when used appropriately, can be an important part of the overall treatment for acute and chronic pain.

These medications are prescribed by doctors and are controlled substances.

## EXAMPLES OF OPIOID PAIN MEDICATIONS

Examples of medications that are opioids include:

Codeine (found in Tylenol #s 1, 2, and 3)

Morphine

Hydrocodone

Norco (Tylenol with hydrocodone)

Hydromorphone

Oxycodone

Percocet (Tylenol with oxycodone)

Dilaudid

Fentanyl

Methadone

Tramadol

## ALTERNATIVES TO OPIOIDS

Medications like Tylenol (Acetaminophen), Aspirin, Advil (Ibuprofen), and Aleve (Naproxen) are not opioids. They may work better to control pain and have fewer side effects than opioids. Although these medications are available over-the-counter, please ask your doctor if they will be suitable for you.

Other alternatives to pain control might include physical therapy, ultrasound treatment, acupuncture, and other forms of therapy that do not require the use of pills. You may discuss this with your doctor or healthcare provider.



## ARE OPIOIDS SAFE FOR YOU?

Opioid pain medications are only safe when used as directed.

Opioid pain medications can be an important part of managing your pain but they are linked with a number of serious side effects.

## WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF OPIOIDS?

- Can make you feel sick to your stomach
- Can slow down your gut and cause constipation
- Can cause problems emptying your bladder
- Can make you sleepy and dizzy and affect your driving ability
- Can make you feel confused and slow down your thinking



## OTHER SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS OF OPIOIDS

- Can affect your balance and walking and cause falls and serious injuries
- Higher doses can slow down your breathing and may even cause death
- When used over a long period of time, your body may no longer respond like it did at first and increasing the dose of the opioid medication may not be helpful
- You may become physically and psychologically dependent and suffer unpleasant withdrawal symptoms when you stop taking the medicine
- If you take opioids for long periods, your body may begin to crave them

## ARE THERE MORE RISKS FOR SIDE EFFECTS OF OPIOIDS IN CERTAIN POPULATIONS?

Yes, the risks of having side effects from opioids are greater if you are a **mature person** (age 60 and older) and:

- If you have conditions like depression and anxiety
- If you have a history of alcohol or other substance use
- If you have memory problems or dementia
- If you have sleep problems
- If you have breathing problems or lung conditions
- If you have heart problems such as congestive heart failure



- If you have muscle weakness
- If you have liver disease like cirrhosis
- If you have problems with walking and balance

## **PRECAUTIONS WHEN TAKING OPIOIDS**

- Never take opioids in greater amounts than what was ordered by your doctor
- Do not drink alcohol while taking opioids
- Do not take sleeping pills and tranquilizers -- when combined with opioids, they may seriously affect your breathing and cause death
- Do not take other opioids if you are already taking an opioid ordered by your doctor
- Do not take pain medication from other family members or friends

- Always let the doctor know about all medications you are currently taking including vitamins and supplements

## OPIOID OVERDOSE

The most important thing to do is call 911 for immediate help!

All persons who have opioids in their home should have **Naloxone** (Narcan) available. This drug will reverse the effects of opioids.

Any Arkansas pharmacy can provide Naloxone without a prescription and the pharmacist will also teach you how to use it.

## STORING OPIOID PAIN MEDICATIONS

- Keep out of the reach of others (family members, friends, children, and pets)
- Store in a locked box out of sight - if you do not have a locked box, keep them in a cabinet out of sight

## DISPOSING OF UNUSED OPIOID PAIN MEDICATIONS

Don't hang on to unused opioid medications (leftovers) for future use. Ask your pharmacist if your unused opioid medications can be disposed of at their pharmacy. Not all pharmacies can take back unused opioid medications.

The Reynolds Institute on Aging at UAMS in Little Rock has an authorized take-back opioid medication and drug disposal box.



## OPIOID PAIN MEDICATIONS IN ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES AND NURSING HOMES

When mature adults are admitted to assisted living facilities and/or nursing homes, it is important to be just as careful with the opioid prescription.

Opioids can commonly cause confusion, worsen memory issues, and result in falls in these facilities.

If you see that your relative or friend is being prescribed opioid pain medication, talk to the doctor or staff nurse at the facility to see if the opioid medication can be changed to a medication that is equally effective but with less side effects.

## **TAKE NOTES**

Sometimes it is hard to remember everything your doctor or healthcare provider talks to you about. It is helpful to take notes and ask questions about things you don't understand.







**O.P.A.L.**  
**(Opioid Prevention for**  
**Aging & Longevity)**



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