



Did You Know? Opioid Pain Medications Can Make It Harder to GO

Opioids (narcotics) are a type of prescription pain medication used for severe pain relief. They should usually be used only for a short time. Long-term opioid use can lead to side effects. Opioids may slow down muscles in your gut making it difficult to have a bowel movement (called constipation). They may also make it harder for your bladder muscles to squeeze to pass urine or empty your bladder (called urinary retention).

Adults who take opioids can have more problems with constipation and urinary retention.

You may have constipation if:

- You often have less than three bowel movements in one week
- You frequently have a hard time passing stools
- You often feel you do not have a complete bowel movement

Constipation that happens quickly or lasts a long time may cause stomach pain, confusion and hemorrhoids.

You may have urinary retention if:

- Your bladder often does not feel empty after using the restroom
- Your urine flow commonly stops and starts, or is slow
- You cannot urinate as often as you feel you need to

If urinary retention happens a lot, you may get bladder and kidney infections.

Other effective pain management options are available with fewer side effects, including:

- Non-drug treatments such as physical therapy, exercise and appropriate nutrition and hydration
- Non-opioid pain medications commonly seen over the counter, such as Aleve, Advil, and Tylenol
- Other methods including lidocaine patches, anti-inflammatory gels, hot and cold compresses, and injections

If you need to continue taking opioids for chronic pain, there are medications and supplements to help you have bowel movements. If you are taking opioids and have constipation, problems passing urine, frequent urine infections, abdominal discomfort or notice blood in stools, speak to your doctor.

You can download the **FREE** NARCANSas app on your cellphone, tablet or computer.

This app will provide you with resources, links, and tools that will help you administer the drug naloxone and provide steps on how to save a person's life in the event of an opioid overdose.

The app also has information for treatment, prevention and recovery of opioid use disorder.

FOR ANDROID USERS: Google Play: <https://bit.ly/2VYcpq8>

FOR APPLE USERS: I-Tunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/narcansas/id1460163807?mt=8>

References

1. de Boer HD, Detriche O, Forget P. Opioid-related side effects: Postoperative ileus, urinary retention, nausea and vomiting, and shivering. A review of the literature. *Best Pract Res Clin Anaesthesiol* [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2020 Jun 16]; 31(4):499-504.
2. Wald A. Patient education: Constipation in adults (Beyond the Basics). Post TW, ed. UpToDate. Waltham, MA: UpToDate Inc. <https://www.uptodate.com/> (2020).
3. Rickey LM. Chronic urinary retention in women. Post TW, ed. UpToDate. Waltham, MA: UpToDate Inc. <https://www.uptodate.com/> (2020).



Division of Aging, Adult and Behavioral
Health Services



Donald W. Reynolds
Institute on Aging

