



Opioid addiction

Frequently asked questions

What are opioid medicines?

Opioids are medicines that doctors prescribe to relieve physical pain. These drugs affect the areas of the brain that control pain and feelings. They increase levels of feel-good brain chemicals. This produces strong feelings of pleasure. However, the brain can become used to these feelings. Then, it may take more of the drug to have the same effect. This can cause people to need the drug more.

What are the names of some common opioid medicines?

- Codeine
- Fentanyl citrate
- Hydrocodone (Vicodin)
- Hydromorphone (Dilaudid)
- Mepedridine (Demerol)
- Morphine (Kadian, Avinza)
- Oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet)

What are opioid medicines used for?

Opioids are used to treat high levels of pain. Other pain medicines may not have helped. Opioids help in treatment of injuries. They also help after surgery and dental work.

How do people get addicted?

Opioids can manage pain safely when taken as prescribed. However, some people taking the drugs have a response of strong pleasure. They may want to get more of this effect. So, they may take the drugs in ways other than as prescribed. They continue taking the drugs even though they may be harming themselves. They may be unable to control their drug use. Addictions usually involve strong cravings for drugs.

Recovery is the process of trying to reverse changes in the brain after drug abuse. This is done through medical help and therapy.

What are signs of an opioid problem?

- Smaller eye pupils
- Nausea
- Itchiness
- Drowsiness
- Talking less with others
- Anxiety
- Poor memory and focus
- Slowed breathing, movement and reactions
- Mood swings
- Depression

What does treatment involve?

Opioid addiction is a long-term disease (like diabetes, asthma or high blood pressure). It cannot be cured. However, doctors can treat it to help people regain healthy lives. Treatment programs often include medical help with slowly stopping the drugs. Counseling (therapy) also is a helpful part of treatment. So is the support of family and friends.

The goal of a treatment program is to have people safely stop drug use. People learn how to replace bad habits with healthier ones. The programs teach skills to help people avoid drugs in the future.

Additional resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Wants people to be able to find safe treatment options. The CDC website has a section on opioid information and FAQs.

cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/patients.html

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Provides information about drugs that are often abused. This includes the latest science and treatments. It also includes trends and statistics.

drugabuse.gov

The American Society of Addiction Medicine

Helps people get better access to addiction care. They offer a national listing of addiction medicine experts.

asam.org

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Helps people find treatment programs for drug and alcohol abuse.

findtreatment.samhsa.gov or 1-800-662-HELP

The Partnership at Drugfree.org

Provides resources for teen drug use and addiction. This is to help parents prevent and act on their children's drug use. The Partnership helps people find treatment.

drugfree.org or 1-855-378-4373

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