

New Protection Measures to Fight the Opioid Epidemic

Our bodies fight pain naturally by producing endorphins. These are also known as the “feel good” chemical. When more pain relief is necessary, our bodies may need help. This is when your doctor may prescribe you an opioid. Opioids can help to decrease pain. These powerful pain-reducing medicines include oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, and more.

When taken as directed, prescription opioids can have great benefits. But when misused, these same drugs have potentially serious risks.



Tolerance and Dependence

After taking opioids for a while, you may feel sick if you stop the drug too fast. This is called **opioid dependence**. This sick feeling is called withdrawal. Someone in bad withdrawal may feel like they have “the worst flu of their life.” Withdrawal symptoms may include diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain, sweating, runny nose, anxiety, and more.

Someone who has taken opioids for a while might also find they need more of the drug to get the same pain-relief. This is called **opioid tolerance**.



Opioid Risks: Misuse and Addiction

In the case of opioids, too much of a good thing can be bad. Overuse may lead to opioid use disorder or addiction. People who are addicted may seek out opioids and take more than they should. Opioids impact the brain. They can cause a brief feeling of intense pleasure. Addiction to opioids can develop very quickly, even with minimal use.

The addiction can be physical, in that the body craves the drug. It can also be mental, in that the person desires the drug’s effects. Often, it is a combination of both. A person with an opioid use disorder may make decisions that could be harmful to their health and wellbeing, regardless of the risks.

Some signs of opioid misuse may include drowsiness, slow breathing, and very small pupils. Opioid misuse can lead to death. Opioid overdose can affect anyone. Because of this, certain rules are in place to try to protect people from opioid-related harm.





Opioid Prescription Rules

- If you need higher doses or a larger day supply, your doctor may need to get it approved. A pharmacy will need this before they can fill your medication.
- If you are prescribed a benzodiazepine with an opioid, your doctor may need to get it approved. Let your doctor know of any medicine you take. This can help them to care for you.
- If you are taking buprenorphine, a drug used to treat opioid use disorder, you may not be able to fill another opioid at the same time. There may be some cases where an opioid could be needed. This is addressed on a case-by-case basis.



Exceptions

There are some exceptions to opioid limits. Some members with cancer, sickle cell crisis, or on palliative or hospice care are left out from some limits.



Getting the Medications You Need

Do you fall into one of the categories above? Discuss your concerns with your doctor. They can make sure your needs are addressed. They can also make sure your pharmacy has the approval needed to dispense your medicine. These rules were not put in place to keep you from getting needed medicine but to make sure they are being dispensed with your best health in mind.

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