

Patient Fact Sheet

Prescription Opioid Risks and Treatment Resources

You have been prescribed an opioid as part of your pain treatment, which may be used following injury, surgery, or arising from other health conditions. All patients taking opioids are at risk for unintentional **overdose**, **addiction**, or **death**. Therefore, you should discuss with your prescriber all treatment options available to you.

Common side effects of opioids include:

- Constipation
- Breathing problems
- Low sex drive, energy, and strength
- Sleepiness/drowsiness
- Confusion
- Nausea

Opioids are powerful painkillers, and if misused can have serious side effects including addiction. Your risk increases if:

- You are also **taking other drugs** like antihistamines, barbiturates, or antidepressant/anxiety medications (e.g., Benzodiazepines)
- You **consume alcohol** while taking opioids
- You or a family member have a **history of substance use disorder** or overdose
- You have a **mental health condition**, such as depression or anxiety
- You have **sleep apnea**
- You take **more than** the recommended prescribed amount

Know Your Options

- Read all instructions for your medication, take your medication exactly as prescribed, do not adjust your doses, and keep track of when you take your medication.
- If you have any questions about your medication ask your prescriber or pharmacist, including information about possible side effects as well as options for seeking a partial fill of the prescription. If you decide to partially fill your prescription opioid, you may need to contact your prescriber if additional medication is needed.
- Talk to your prescriber about non-opioid treatment options or if you don't want to be treated with opioids.
- Ask your prescriber about having an antidote (e.g., naloxone) in case of an accidental overdose.

Protecting Family, Friends, and Others

STORAGE: Medications should be kept in a **locked cabinet or box** when not in use. Medications should be placed in a location hard for children and pets to reach.

DISPOSAL: For the safety of others and the environment, patients are encouraged to take advantage of drug take-back programs and safe drop sites. When these programs are not accessible, other secondary methods including flushing the medication down the toilet should be considered.

Addiction Resources

Be aware of the signs of addiction, which include uncontrollable cravings and inability to control opioid use even though it is having negative effects on personal relationships or finances. If you suspect or are concerned about addiction, the following resources may help:

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA): www.drugabuse.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA): www.samhsa.gov

The Patient Fact Sheet is available at www.massmed.org/opioidpatientfactsheetext.

Jointly issued by the Massachusetts Medical Society, the Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association, and the Massachusetts College of Emergency Physicians.

These opioid prescribing guidelines follow Massachusetts laws and regulations as of August 2015. Practitioners outside of Massachusetts should follow applicable laws and regulations in their own state.