



## Patient Health Guide: Understanding Pain and Using Pain Medicines Safely

Everyone experiences pain at some point. There are different kinds of pain, and one person's pain is not the same as another person's pain.

Pain is very common after an injury (such as a broken bone) or after surgery. This is called *acute pain*. With acute pain, pain medicine is usually only needed for a few days or a few weeks.

Sometimes pain lasts longer than a few weeks and does not go away (such as arthritis or back pain). This is called *chronic pain*. Your doctor will discuss which medicines and other treatments (such as physical therapy) will help your chronic pain. Since your pain may not go away completely, talk with your doctor about the amount of pain you can tolerate in order to continue most of your normal daily activities. Having some pain after surgery or after getting hurt is normal and should be expected.

### How can YOU be involved in managing your pain?

- Describe the type of pain you are having (such as sharp, aching, stabbing, tingling or throbbing).
- Rate your pain on a scale (such as a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the worst pain you have ever had). This will help your doctor select the right treatment for you.
- Discuss other non-medication treatments that might help your pain.
- Discuss how much activity you should do and which activities you should avoid.
- Get plenty of rest if you are recovering from acute pain.
- Wear supportive shoes that support your balance and help prevent falls.
- As you start to feel better, talk to your doctor about lowering the dose of your pain medicine or switching to a non-opioid pain medicine.
- Keep your follow-up appointments with your doctor and therapists even if you are feeling better.

### Understand the following about the medicine you are taking for pain:

- If it is safe for you to drive or work while taking pain medicine;
- The side effects of the medicine you are taking;
- How often you can take each medicine;
- Which medicines are taken on “schedule” (such as “take every 8 hours”) or “as needed” (such as “take every 6 hours as needed for pain”); and
- The maximum number of pills you can take in a 24-hour period.

### Tell your doctor or pharmacist if:

- You have any allergies to medicine;
- You cannot pay for your medicine;
- You have trouble taking your medicine;
- Your medicine makes you feel worse; or if
- You are worried about the possible side effects (such as being constipated or extremely tired or drowsy) from your medicine.

## Common Non-Opioid Medicines Used to Help with Pain

MEDICINE TYPE	EXAMPLES	POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS
Acetaminophen	Tylenol®	Upset stomach (nausea) Liver problems
Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)	Celecoxib (Celebrex®) Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) Naproxen (Naprosyn®, Aleve®) Ketorolac (Toradol®)	Increased risk of bleeding Upset stomach (nausea) Kidney problems
Corticosteroids ( <i>not the same as steroids misused by athletes</i> )	Dexamethasone Prednisone Methylprednisolone (Medrol®)	Increased appetite Upset stomach (nausea)
Muscle Relaxants	Cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril®) Baclofen Methocarbamol (Robaxin®)	Confused Dizzy Sleepy
Antidepressants	Amitriptyline (Elavil®) Duloxetine (Cymbalta®) Venlafaxine (Effexor®)	Confused Dizzy Sleepy
Anticonvulsants	Gabapentin (Neurontin®) Pregabalin (Lyrica®)	Confused Dizzy or drowsy Swelling
Numbing medicine	Lidocaine patch (Salonpas®)	Skin irritation
Other	Dicyclomine (Bentyl®) Diphenhydramine (Benadryl®) Meclizine (Bonine®) Metoclopramide (Reglan®) Promethazine (Phenergan®)	Dry mouth Sleepy

## Common Opioid Medicines Used to Help with Pain

MEDICINE TYPE	EXAMPLES	POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS
Short-Acting Opioids	Hydrocodone + Acetaminophen* (Norco®, Vicodin® or Lortab®) Hydromorphone (Dilaudid®) Morphine Oxycodone Oxycodone + Acetaminophen* (Percocet®) Tramadol (Ultram®)	Confused Constipated Dizzy Rash or itching Sleepy Upset stomach (nausea) Vomiting
Long-Acting Opioids	Morphine Extended Release (MSContin®) Oxycodone Extended Release (OxyContin®)	Confused Constipated Dizzy Rash or itching Sleepy Upset stomach (nausea) Vomiting

\*Denotes medicines also containing acetaminophen (Tylenol®)

## Examples of Non-Medication Treatments Used to Help with Pain

- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Behavioral/Cognitive Interventions (such as meditation & relaxation techniques)
- Comfort Care activities (such as coloring, playing cards, stress balls)
- Compression Therapy (Hot or Cold)
- Counseling or Behavioral Therapy
- Elevating painful area
- Environmental modifications (such as lighting or temperature adjustments)
- Exercise and stretching
- Hypnosis
- Massage
- Music Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Rest
- Spine or Nerve Stimulation
- Yoga or Tai Chi



## If you are taking an opioid medicine for pain:

### DO:

- Talk to your doctor about creating a pain management plan for you. Discuss concerns and possible risks of taking an opioid.
- You may be asked to sign a consent form stating that you understand the risks and that you will take the medicine as prescribed.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had a problem with substance abuse.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about medicines you should avoid while taking an opioid. Opioids can cause drowsiness or trouble breathing if taken with other medicines (such as benzodiazepines or “benzos” or muscle relaxants).
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if your opioid medicine also contains acetaminophen (Tylenol®). Too much Tylenol can cause harm. If your opioid medicine contains Tylenol, always ask before taking over-the-counter Tylenol. Ask how much Tylenol can be taken in a 24-hour period.
- Follow up with your primary doctor or pain doctor as scheduled.
- Talk to your doctor about lowering the dose of your opioid medicine when you start feeling better. Ask if there are other non-opioid treatments that might help your pain.
- Safely get rid of unused medicine when your doctor tells you to stop taking it.
- Ask your doctor if you should have a prescription for naloxone (Narcan®).
- Call 911 immediately if you or someone else might be having an overdose from an opioid medicine (symptoms such as breathing problems or no breathing sounds, feeling very confused or dizzy, or not able to wake up).



### DO NOT:

- Do not take an opioid more frequently than prescribed, and do not change the dose of your medicine without talking to your doctor or pharmacist. Opioids can be very harmful or cause an overdose if you do not follow the directions.
- Do not drink alcohol when taking an opioid medicine.
- Do not sell or share your opioid medicine with anyone else. This is illegal. The dose you are taking may be high enough to cause an overdose or death of someone else.
- Do not take anyone else’s opioid medicine.
- Do not take an opioid medicine for longer than your doctor prescribed.
- Do not be afraid to call your doctor if you think you might be experiencing one of the following from an opioid medicine:
  - Tolerance—you feel like you need more pain medicine to feel better; or
  - Dependence—you feel like you need the medicine or have withdrawal after you stop taking it.
- Do not be afraid to call your doctor immediately or call The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) National Helpline at **1.800.662.HELP** if you think you might be addicted to an opioid or other medicine. Signs of addiction include craving the medicine for reasons other than pain, trying to get the medicine from someone else or without a prescription, and mood changes.



## How to Safely Store Medicine:

- Opioids and all medicines should be stored securely with a lock. It is best if you can lock them in a place that cannot be seen by children or friends.
- Do not leave medicine or pill containers on counters or tables.
- Do not keep loose pills in plastic bags.

## How to Get Rid of Old or Unused Medicine:

- When your doctor tells you to stop taking a medicine, do not save the medicine for later.
- It is very important to get rid of expired medicine or medicine that you no longer take. You do not want someone else to find the medicine by accident.
- Do not flush medicine down the toilet or pour it down the sink because it can pollute the water. This is illegal in some states.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if there is somewhere in your area where you can drop off old or expired medicines. Many towns have a medicine “drop box” or “disposal box” in the pharmacy or a public location. No questions will be asked.

## Resources:

- Information for Patients from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
[cdc.gov/drugoverdose/patients/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/patients/index.html)
- Search for a medicine “drop box” or “disposal box” in your area—you can enter your town or zip code  
<https://apps.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch>
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) can help you if you think you might be addicted to an opioid or other medicine or want more information. It is confidential, free and open 24 hours every day. Call the National Helpline at **1.800.662.HELP** or visit [samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline).

Disclaimer: This health guide content is based on medical literature review and is considered only general information relating to a disease management plan. The information and practices described in the guide are not intended as substitutes for clinical or medical advice prescribed by a medical provider for an individual patient that is based on the individual's history, condition and current medical assessment. This information is not intended to be comprehensive about the subjects addressed and may include information that is time-sensitive and subject to change.

