



PAIN PATIENTS AND OPIOID DEPENDENCE

Many people are prescribed medications containing opioids for treating pain, often after an injury or surgery. Most opioids are used to treat pain that is moderate to severe. Mild (low-level) pain can usually be treated with non-opioid medications like paracetamol, aspirin and ibuprofen.

As opioids are sold under brand names that don't tell you what the medication contains, many people who are prescribed these drugs don't realise they are actually taking an opioid. Many people also don't realise that medicines prescribed by their doctor can be dangerous.

OPIOID DEPENDENCE AND ADDICTION

People who take opioids for a medical condition can become dependent on (addicted to) them. Being dependent means that your body is used to having opioids in your system and needs them to function properly. Opioid dependence can be very hard to deal with; the best way to deal with it is with help from a doctor.

If you're dependent on opioids, stopping or reducing the amount you take can cause physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms.

You should not attempt to stop taking opioids or reduce the amount you're taking without consulting your doctor.

SIGNS OF DEPENDENCE AND ADDICTION

There's a range of signs that suggest someone may be dependent on, or addicted to, opioids. Most of these are physical symptoms that the individual person experiences, but they can also include changes in the person's behaviour.

Signs of opioid dependence or addiction include:

- Needing a higher dose to get the same effect
- Taking more opioids or taking them for longer than planned
- Spending increased time and effort getting opioids
- Experiencing withdrawal if you stop taking opioids or reduce your dose
- Reducing the time you spend on other activities like work, sport or family
- Continuing to take the medication even though it's causing you problems

If you think you might be becoming dependent on, or addicted to, your opioid medication, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I taking more than the prescribed dose?
- Am I taking opioids for something other than for what they were prescribed?
- Am I going to the doctor more frequently to get the amount of medication I need?
- Am I getting opioids through methods other than my regular doctor?
- Do I feel like my pain or mood get worse if I don't take my medication?
- Do I get anxious about the idea of not taking my medication?
- Do I need the medication to function in daily life (beyond just relieving pain)?
- Am I using different methods to take opioids (i.e. snorting, injecting)?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, you may want to speak to your doctor.



International Overdose Awareness Day

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO OPIOID DEPENDENCE AND ADDICTION

There are lots of ways to reduce your chances of developing opioid dependence and addiction. Knowing and paying attention to the factors that may contribute to opioid dependence and addiction is a good start.

These include:

- History of dependence or misuse of opioids or other drugs
- History of mental illness
- Chronic pain
- Childhood trauma
- Being prescribed higher doses of opioids for a longer time

Anyone can become dependent on opioids but these are known factors that increase your risk. Not everyone who has chronic pain or a history of misuse will become dependent.

Dependence and addiction are also highly stigmatised so people who are dependent or addicted may experience discrimination from other people, health services or police. This can make people feel ashamed and prevent them asking for help. Dependence or addiction is a medical condition that many people struggle with. You should not be made to feel ashamed for experiencing dependence or seeking help.

People who are dependent or addicted still have the right to have their pain treated and to be given the best healthcare for their needs.

LEARN MORE

To learn more about opioids, opioid dependence (which may be diagnosed as Opioid Use Disorder or OUD) and about different options for treatment, visit lifesavers.global
