

What are opioids?

Prescription narcotics (“opioid”) is a category of commonly-prescribed painkillers. Doctors prescribe them, typically in pill form, to help patients with severe or chronic pain. When they’re taken as directed by a medical professional, they’re relatively safe and can be beneficial. But there is *always* a risk of addiction. And that risk increases greatly when you abuse prescription painkillers.

What is prescription painkiller abuse?

- Taking prescription painkillers in a way that was not prescribed, such as taking too many pills at one time, combining pills with alcohol or other drugs, or crushing pills into powder to snort or inject them.
- Taking someone else’s prescription painkiller, even if you’re doing so for the medication’s intended purpose, to ease pain.
- Taking prescription painkillers for the sole purpose of feeling good or getting high.

Repeated abuse of narcotics– prescription painkillers – can lead to addiction and even death.

Who is at risk for addiction?

People who abuse prescription painkillers have a greater risk of addiction than people who take them as prescribed – but it’s important to remember that the medication itself is addictive. Even someone who takes opioids (narcotics) as prescribed by a doctor can develop a physical dependence on the drug, especially if prescribed for several weeks or more.

When someone who has become dependent on a prescription narcotic painkiller stops using it, they will likely experience withdrawal symptoms including restlessness, difficulty concentrating, anxiety, anger, depression, muscle or bone pain, nausea and more. Therefore, the risk of addiction should be weighed against the benefits of the medication and any concerns should be discussed with your doctor.

What are the dangers of prescription painkillers?

Taking just one dose too large can cause serious health problems and potentially lead to death. Here’s a dose of reality: Deaths from unintended drug overdoses have been rising sharply in recent years. In 2011, prescription painkillers accounted for close to 17,000 deaths in the United States. That’s more than three times the number of deaths a decade earlier – just 5,528 in 2001 (National Institute on Drug Abuse). Remember, the risk of overdose and death increases exponentially when prescription painkillers are combined with other drugs or alcohol. Hospital visits involving opioid acute poisoning (including overdose) increased from 25.3 to 52.0 per 100,000 between 2006 and 2014.

Common Prescription Opioid (Narcotic) Painkillers

Oxycodone Brand Names: OxyContin®, Percodan®, Percocet®

Hydrocodone Brand Names: Vicodin®, Lortab®, Lorcet®

Diphenoxylate Brand Names: Lomotil®

Morphine Brand Names: Kadian®, Avinza®, MS Contin®

Codeine Various Brand Names

Fentanyl Brand Name: Duragesic®

Propoxyphene Brand Name: Darvon®

Hydromorphone Brand Name: Dilaudid®

Meperidine Brand Name: Demerol®

Methadone Various Brand Names

Addiction affects people from all walks of life.