

# Talking about opioid medications

**Step 1:**  
Share an  
observation

**Caregiver:**

"I've noticed you seemed extra tired lately and skipped coffee with your friends."

**Adult:**

"I guess I've just been a little off. Maybe it's the weather."

**Step 2:**  
Share an  
**emotion**  
and be  
curious

"I'm **sad** that you haven't seen your friends. I also wonder if your pain medicine might be making you feel more tired."

"Maybe. I've been taking my pills the same as always."

**Step 3:**  
Talk about a  
friend with a  
similar problem

"Susan's dad had trouble keeping track of his pills. Have you had any trouble like that?"

"Sometimes I forget if I took it already. I do feel off, but I don't want to change it."

**Step 4:**  
Normalize  
experience and  
learn more

"That's normal to have a hard time keeping track. What changes have you noticed with your pain medication?"

"Mostly the dizziness. I'm afraid if we change the dose, the pain will come back."

**Step 5:**  
Offer  
options  
but don't  
rush

"Maybe we start by using a pill organizer or talking to your doctor about the dizziness the next time we see her."

"That might be helpful. I've been meaning to ask her about the dizziness anyway."

# Learn more about...

How to talk about opioid misuse

[txopioidresponse.org/  
how-to-help-someone](https://txopioidresponse.org/how-to-help-someone)

Non-opioid pain management

[voices.uchicago.edu/icope/  
at-home-treatments](https://voices.uchicago.edu/icope/at-home-treatments)

Older adult medication safety

[wapc.org/programs/education/  
older-adult-medication-safety](https://wapc.org/programs/education/older-adult-medication-safety)

Safe medication return

[medtakebackwashington.org](https://medtakebackwashington.org)

Medication management

[aarp.org/pri/initiatives/  
home-alone-alliance](https://aarp.org/pri/initiatives/home-alone-alliance)

Naloxone and overdose info

[stopoverdose.org](https://stopoverdose.org)

Opioid use disorder and treatment

[learnabouttreatment.org](https://learnabouttreatment.org)

Call the **Washington Recovery Help Line**  
24 hours a day/7 days a week to talk about  
options and connect to care: 866-789-1511

This brochure provides basic information for educational  
purposes. Speak with a health care professional to make an  
informed decision that best fits your family's needs.



# Opioid Medications and Adults:

A resource for  
family caregivers

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For list of references visit: [saulpetersky.com/research](https://saulpetersky.com/research)



## Are you a caregiver?



### As a family caregiver, you might:

- ✓ Help organize medications
- ✓ Watch for side effects
- ✓ Talk to healthcare providers
- ✓ Offer emotional support

## What are opioids?

### Opioids are pain medicines, like:

- Oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet)
- Hydrocodone (Vicodin, Norco)
- Morphine
- Fentanyl

### Opioids can:

- ✓ Help with pain
- ✓ Cause relaxation or emotional comfort
- X Cause side effects like sleepiness, confusion, constipation, or falls
- X Be easy to misuse by accident
- X Risk development of opioid use disorder (OUD)

## What is opioid misuse?

- Taking too much medication or too often
- Doubling doses to “catch up” on pain
- Using someone else’s medication
- Using opioids that are obtained illegally

### Sometimes, misuse happens because:

- The person gets confused about doses
- They’re afraid of more pain or withdrawal
- They use opioids intentionally for enjoyment or to cope with emotions



### Adults who misuse might:

- Face stigma by healthcare providers
- Struggle to get good pain care
- Hide problems out of fear or shame
- Feel judged or misunderstood about needing stronger pain medicine

## Your role as a caregiver

- 8 in 10 family caregivers find pain management stressful
- When a family caregiver is involved, the adult is more likely to stick to the doctor’s plan for pain management
- Conversations about opioid medication misuse get easier for families with time and practice

## Accidental overdose



- If someone takes more opioids than their body can handle, they can pass out, stop breathing, and die
- Anyone who uses opioids can overdose
- Nearly 40% of opioid overdose deaths occur with a bystander present

**Naloxone (Narcan)** is a safe medicine used to quickly stop the effects of overdose, like an EpiPen does for allergies.

- It helps a person start breathing again
- It can be sprayed in the nose or injected
- Caregivers' naloxone knowledge can increase by 33% after receiving training

## Medication management

- Involve the adult and their doctor
- Keep a medication list
- Use pill organizers
- Dispose of unused opioids safely
- Secure opioids away from other household members and pets
- Document medication doses and times



## Medication access

### Pros of restricting medication access

- Reduces risk of mixing up pills
- Increases caregiver peace of mind

### Cons of restricting medication access

- Can hurt trust
- May cause hiding pills; research shows this may increase risk of accidental overdose

## How to start talking

- Choose the right time to talk
- Don’t take control without talking about it first and receiving permission
- Offer options and make a plan together
- See next page for a conversation guide