

# KNOW YOUR Rights, Risks and Responsibilities



Pain is a common medical problem that can be treated. The keys to getting the most benefit out of pain treatment are to learn as much as you can about any medicines your healthcare professional prescribes, to follow their instructions and talk to your healthcare professional or pharmacist about anything that concerns you.

If you or a loved one is currently taking prescription opioids, or if opioids are discussed or recommended as part of your treatment regime, it's important to understand your rights, risks and responsibilities.

## What are Prescription Opioids?

Prescription opioids are strong pain-reducing medications. Common prescription opioids include, hydrocodone, oxycodone, oxymorphone, codeine, morphine, methadone and fentanyl.<sup>i</sup>

## Rights

As a patient, you have certain rights when it comes to filling or managing your opioid prescription. Some of these rights are legal rights protected by federal law — like your right to see your medical records and your right to keep these records private. Many hospitals and physician practices also have a patient bill of rights.

When it comes to opioid use, you have the right to informed consent — meaning you have a right to get the information you need to make an informed decision about the prescription and treatments you choose. This begins with understanding whether the medication you have been prescribed is an opioid. Protect this right by being an active and informed consumer when it comes to your use of prescription drugs:

- **Ask your healthcare professional about alternative pain treatments.** There may be non-opioid options that work better without the risks or potential side effects.
- **Explore your partial-fill prescription options.** Some states allow prescriptions for certain opioid medications to be partially filled by pharmacists at the request of patients or healthcare professionals. Partial-fills allow you to pick up and

pay for a smaller supply of opioids and return for the remainder of the prescription later, if you need it.

- **Contact your healthcare professional about any side effects** or to discuss options for tapering your use.
- **Get help from family members or friends** if you are having trouble with opioid use or need help advocating for yourself or understanding information from your healthcare professional.

## Risks of Opioid Use

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are potential risks and side effects associated with prescription opioid use. These include:

- **Addiction:** As many as one in four patients receiving long-term opioid therapy in a primary care setting struggles with opioid dependence or addiction. Symptoms of addiction can be physical, behavioral and psychological; the clearest sign being the inability to stop using the substance. Once addicted, it can be hard to stop. In 2014, nearly two million Americans either abused or were dependent on prescription opioid pain relievers.
- **Overdose (respiratory depression):** Taking too many prescription opioids can stop a person from breathing and lead to death. The risk of overdose happening can rise if a person takes opioids along with other medicines, such as sedatives or tranquilizers, that can affect the way they breathe.

Alcohol also can significantly increase the risk of overdose. This is why it is important to tell your healthcare professional about all the medicines you are taking even if you only take it some of the time, and if you drink alcohol. Drug overdose deaths and those involving opioids continue to increase in the United States. More than 115 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.<sup>ii</sup>

In addition to the risk of addiction and overdose, patients who take prescription opioids may also experience side effects. CDC warns patients of the following potential side effects:

- Tolerance — meaning with continued use, you might need to take more of the medication for the same pain relief
- Physical dependence — meaning you have symptoms of withdrawal when you stop taking the medication
- Increased sensitivity to pain
- Constipation
- Nausea, vomiting and dry mouth
- Sleepiness and dizziness
- Confusion
- Depression
- Low levels of testosterone that can result in lower sex drive, energy and strength
- Itching and sweating<sup>iii</sup>

## Responsibilities

If you and your healthcare professional decide that prescription opioids are the right choice for you, be sure you understand your responsibility to safely use, store and dispose of prescription medicines. Remember that your healthcare professional prescribed this medicine for your use only. In addition, they are to be taken only for the condition your healthcare professional prescribed them. Opioids are powerful medicines and can be dangerous when used in ways they were not intended:

- **Take medicines ONLY as prescribed.**
- **Keep a current list of your medicines**, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and dietary/herbal supplements. Bring your up-to-date medicine list to all of your medical and pharmacy visits.
- **Keep opioids and all other medicines in a safe place**, out of the reach of children. Keep your medicines in a secure, preferably locked place. For more information on safe medicine storage visit [www.upandaway.org](http://www.upandaway.org).
- **Never give away or share** your medicines with others.
- **Review your medicines** every six months and properly dispose of all expired, unused or unwanted medicines as soon as possible.
- **Find the disposal location** in your area by visiting [www.AgainstOpioidAbuse.org/disposal](http://www.AgainstOpioidAbuse.org/disposal).

For more information about the risks of opioids and things you can do to prevent abuse and misuse, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://CentersforDiseaseControlandPrevention).



If you or someone close to you has an addiction to pain medication, talk to your healthcare professional or contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's treatment help line at **(800) 662-HELP**.

Allied Against Opioid Abuse is a national education and awareness initiative to help prevent abuse and misuse of prescription opioids. Founded by the Healthcare Distribution Alliance, the initiative is a collaborative effort with diverse partners across the pharmaceutical supply chain, as well as organizations that are experts in public health and healthcare. Our goal is to contribute to solving the opioid crisis in a meaningful way by educating patients about their rights, risks and responsibilities. To learn more visit [www.AgainstOpioidAbuse.org](http://www.AgainstOpioidAbuse.org) or follow us on Twitter @AAOA\_Tweets.

ALLIED AGAINST  
**Opioid Abuse**

NCPIE encourages healthcare professionals and community groups to foster patient-professional communication about medicines. However, NCPIE does not supervise or endorse the activities of any group or professional. Discussion and action concerning medicines are solely the responsibility of the patient and their healthcare professionals, and not NCPIE. Please consult a licensed healthcare professional with questions or concerns about your medication and/or condition.



<sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/patients/faq.html](http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/patients/faq.html)

<sup>ii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/prescribed.html](http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/prescribed.html)

<sup>iii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/AHA-Patient-Opioid-Factsheet-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/AHA-Patient-Opioid-Factsheet-a.pdf)