



# Managing Your Pain at Home



## Other Pain Control Options

The best treatment for long-term pain isn't opioids. Other methods may work better, and have fewer risks and side effects. Ask your doctor about other pain relief options:

- Pain relievers such as Tylenol, Aleve or Advil
- Medications that are used for depression or seizures
- Non-medication activities that may include physical therapy or relaxation techniques

## Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Hotline: (800) 662-4357

If you're concerned about addiction, this hotline offers free and confidential information in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for individuals and family members facing substance abuse and mental health issues.

Keeping your pain under control can help you get well faster and return to your normal activities more quickly. Pain can be managed in many ways, so talk to your doctor about the right methods for you. Sometimes, non-medication measures may work better and have fewer risks and side effects.

### The key to effective pain control is:

- Addressing your pain early
- Following your doctor's plan for pain control
- Talking openly with your health care team

You may have some pain, even if you're taking pain medication. The goal is to control your pain, not make it go away completely. Ask yourself: Can I carry out normal activities, such as getting dressed, moving or getting out of bed? Can I complete activity or treatments that are needed to help me recover?

Pain is a personal thing and the amount or type of pain varies from person to person. Certain activities may make your pain worse. Ask your doctor if you have concerns about activities that are safe to perform. If you feel like your pain medication isn't working, talk to your doctor. You may need to make changes to your pain control plan.



## Pain Relief Methods

- Apply warm or cold packs, if directed by your doctor.
- Practice slow, rhythmic breathing to help relax. Breathe in and out slowly and regularly, at a rate that feels good to you. Imagine that you're in a very calming and relaxing place. End with a slow, deep breath. If you can, try to do this in a quiet place.
- Comforting the spirit, as well as the mind and body, can help you cope with pain. This may include talking, praying or reading. It may also include contacting your faith community.
- Over-the-counter pain medication
- Prescription pain medication

## Taking Pain Medication

Not all pain must be treated with pain medications. They are used for pain that's severe. You must take pain medication safely. Here are some things to know:

- Take pain medication as prescribed. Never take more than directed and don't take it more often than directed.
- Don't wait until your pain is severe to take pain medication. It'll be harder to control your pain.
- Time your dose of pain medication so that you take it before you do anything that may cause pain, such as walking or exercising.
- Follow directions – some medications may cause nausea if they're not taken with food.
- If pain is not relieved or gets worse, call your nurse or doctor.
- Many prescription pain medications cause constipation. To help, have more water, fruits and veggies. Talk to your doctor about using a laxative, if needed.
- **Warning:** Don't drink alcohol while taking pain medication.





## Opioid Pain Medications

You may be given opioid pain medications. Not all pain requires these strong medications, but they're necessary to treat pain for some patients. Taking opioids safely is important.

Per Florida state law, the amount of opioid pain medication that your health care provider can prescribe may be limited. The law is designed to lower the risks of taking opioids. The law also promotes close follow up with your health care provider to decide if more opioid pain medications are needed.

### What Are Opioids?

Prescription opioids are used to treat more severe pain, often after surgery or serious injury. Opioid pain medications do have risks and they may not be safe or helpful for treating long-term pain. Work closely with your health care team to make sure you're getting the safest, most effective care.

### Examples of opioids:

|                         |  |   |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Codeine                 | Hydrocodone/<br>acetaminophen<br>(Lortab, Norco,<br>Vicodin) | Oxycodone<br>(OxyContin,<br>Roxicodone)               |
| Meperidine<br>(Demerol) | Hydromorphone<br>(Dilaudid)                                  | Oxycodone/<br>acetaminophen<br>(Percocet,<br>Endocet) |
| Hydrocodone             | Fentanyl (Actiq,<br>Duragesic)                               | Morphine  |

## Opioid Risks

- **Addiction:** One in four people who take opioids long-term struggles with addiction.
- **Overdose:** Taking too much of an opioid can cause sudden death.
- **Tolerance:** Over time, you may need to take more of the drug to get the same pain relief.
- **Physical dependence:** You may have diarrhea, stomach pain, body aches and nausea, when stopping the drug.
- **Pain sensitivity:** You may become more sensitive to pain if you take opioids for more than seven days.

### Risks are greatest with:

- A history of drug misuse, substance abuse disorder, or overdose
- Mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety
- Sleep apnea
- Older age (65 years or older)
- Pregnancy
- Using more than one opioid at a time (for example, oral medication and a skin patch)

### Common Opioid Side Effects

- Constipation
- Nausea
- Depression
- Slowed breathing
- Confusion
- Dry mouth
- Sweating
- Vomiting
- Itching

Opioid medications may make you dizzy, drowsy or faint, and increase your risk of falling. Don't drive or do anything that could be dangerous while taking opioids. Sit or lie down if you feel dizzy, and stand up carefully.

Opioids are also known to slow down your brain's ability to respond and make responsible decisions. You shouldn't be responsible for the care of others, such as small children, while taking these medications. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you have concerns about side effects, or if you're pregnant or breastfeeding.



## Things to Avoid

For your safety, DO NOT take any of the following while taking opioids unless your doctor says it's alright:

- Alcohol
- Benzodiazepines, such as Xanax or Valium
- Muscle relaxants including Soma or Flexeril
- Hypnotics, such as Ambien or Lunesta
- Other opioids from another doctor

### Opioid Medications in Your Home

Prescription opioids carry serious risks of addiction and overdose. It's important to help prevent misuse or abuse.

- Don't share or sell your opioid medication
- Don't use opioid medication that isn't prescribed for you.
- Store prescription opioids in a safe place and out of reach of others, including visitors, children, friends and family
- When you no longer need opioid medications, get rid of them safely.
  - Medication take-back programs are the safest way to get rid of most types of unneeded medications. Local law enforcement agencies or pharmacies may sponsor medication take-back programs in your community.
  - You can take your unused opioid medications (no needles) to:
    - Any police department in Pinellas County
    - Any Hillsborough County district sheriff's office or Tampa police department district office
    - Winter Haven Police Department (loose pills and capsules only, in bags)
    - Lakeland Police Department (pills and capsules only)
    - Any Pasco County district sheriff's office

If you can't dispose of your medications through a take-back program and there are no specific disposal instructions on the label, here are some simple steps to dispose of medications in your trash:

**MIX**  
Mix medicines (do not crush tablets or capsules) with an unpalatable substance such as dirt, kitty litter, or used coffee grounds;

**PLACE**  
Place the mixture in a container such as a sealed plastic bag;

**THROW**  
Throw the container in your household trash;

**SCRATCH OUT**  
Scratch out all personal information on the prescription label of your empty pill bottle or empty medicine packaging to make it unreadable, then dispose of the container.

Abuse of and addiction to opioid pain medication are common problems. Here are some signs that you or a loved one may need help due to opioid misuse:

- Poor coordination
- Drowsiness
- Shallow or slow breathing
- Nausea or vomiting
- Constipation
- Poor decision making
- Missing work or school, or not meeting other responsibilities
- Slurred speech
- Changes in sleep
- Mood swings
- Feeling high
- Irritability
- Depression
- Low motivation
- Anxiety attacks