

Opioids, Addiction, and Overdose

What are Opioids?

Most opioids are legal drugs that help ease pain. They are very powerful. They are also very addictive. A person can become addicted after as few as 3 days of using opioid drugs. Opioids are meant for severe pain caused by cancer or the pains of dying. Some common opioid drugs are:

- ⇒ Morphine
- ⇒ Codeine
- ⇒ Hydrocodone (Vicodin)
- ⇒ Oxycodone (OxyContin)
- ⇒ Fentanyl
- ⇒ Methadone

⇒ **Heroin is also an opioid. It is the only illegal opioid drug.**

It is dangerous to take opioids with benzodiazepine drugs like Xanax, Valium or Ativan because the two powerful drugs can interact and cause an overdose or other poor health effects.



Who is at risk for an opioid overdose?

- Anyone who takes opioid drugs, especially high doses
- Anyone who uses alcohol, anti-depressants, or benzodiazepine drugs with opioid drugs
- Anyone who abuses legal opioids or heroin
- Anyone who has recently detoxed from opioids or who is recently recovered from opioid addiction (their tolerance is lower so a relapse could be fatal)

What are signs of opioid abuse or addiction?

- Taking opioids in a different way than the doctor advised
- Taking opioids “just in case” even when not in pain
- Changes in mood or emotion
- Blurry vision
- Problems at work, school or with other responsibilities
- Often feeling very sleepy
- Opioid prescriptions from more than one doctor
- Problems with memory, focus and decision making
- Sleeping more or less than normal
- Constipation



How to recognize an opioid overdose:

- Unable to wake the person up
- Slow or shallow breathing
- Blue or gray lips and fingernails
- Pale and/or moist skin
- Pinpoint pupils
- Floppy arms and legs/limp body
- Vomiting/throwing up
- Breathing or heartbeat slows or stops
- If they are awake but not able to talk