

FROM PRESCRIPTION...TO ADDICTION!

It is no secret that the abuse of prescription painkillers has reached epidemic proportions, or that many in the medical community consider it a full-blown public health crisis. Even worse, the cycle of painkiller use, dependency and addiction shows no sign of slowing down. If anything, the problem is getting worse with every passing day.

The numbers are simply staggering. In 2015, more than 50,000 men and women lost their lives to drug overdoses, and many of those deaths were linked to the abuse of prescription pain medications and the use of heroin as a replacement source of pain relief.

The problem has gotten so bad that many patients are afraid to take prescription opioids, even for legitimate pain relief. Those going home after surgery may feel their only options are to suffer through the pain or suffer the dangers of dependency and addiction.

The good news is those are not the only two options. When carefully prescribed and properly used, opioid pain medications can bring relief without addiction. Whether you are coming home from the hospital after surgery or dealing with an ongoing chronic pain situation, there are things you can do to make taking prescription painkillers safer.

RESOURCES

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

www.samhsa.gov

National Institute on Drug Abuse:

www.drugabuse.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

www.cdc.gov/pwud/substance-treatment.html

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PRESCRIPTION TO ADDICTION: HOW TO MANAGE YOUR PAIN MEDICATION



AVOID ADDICTION

..... Properly Take Medication

One of the most effective ways to avoid problems when taking prescription painkillers is to take the pills carefully and in accordance with the instructions of your doctor. When used as directed, prescription opioids are exceptionally effective at treating pain, but care must be used to avoid dependency and addiction.

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If you are being discharged from the hospital after an operation, bring a friend with you when you talk to the doctor and receive your discharge instructions. You may be a bit groggy after your hospitalization, and having a second set of ears to hear the instructions can help a great deal.

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Ask your doctor to prescribe the least amount of prescription pain medication possible for your post-hospitalization needs. If your doctor expects you to experience post-op pain for three days, prescribing a 3-5 day supply can protect you and the prescriber.

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Using these steps can protect you and greatly reduce the dangers of opioid addiction and dependency.



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Warning Signs of Addiction

It is important to know the warning signs of a looming addiction. The sooner you recognize these red flags, the sooner you can get the help you need. You should call your doctor immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms of addiction:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Increased pain or the need for more pills
- Irritability
- Changes in mood
- Lack of appetite or the inability to eat
- Attempts to quit have failed

Withdrawal Signs

One of the biggest problems with using painkillers is that these medications can be physically addictive, especially when overused. If you have become dependent on prescription painkillers and try to stop, you may experience some of these classic withdrawal symptoms:

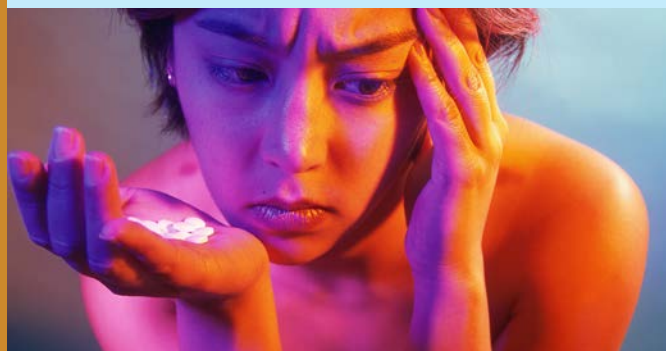
- Nausea and vomiting
- Chills and cold sweats
- Stomach pain
- Agitation and anxiety
- Muscle cramps and tension
- Shaking and quivering
- Diarrhea
- Bone pain

If you experience any of the above symptoms when stopping your prescription painkiller use, you should contact your family doctor, or an addiction specialist, as soon as possible. You may need help to safely overcome addiction.

Don't Go It Alone: Get the Support You Need!

SAMHSA's National Helpline is available 24-hour a day with free and confidential treatment referral and information regarding substance abuse disorders, prevention and treatment options. For a list of options in your area, call **800-662-HELP (4357)**.

Individual or group counseling can help you to learn ways to handle your medication and lessen the likelihood of addiction. Talk to your doctor or health care provider for a list of options in your area.



Not a Give and Take

The sharing of prescription pain medications is a major risk factor for opioid misuse and abuse. It could be something as simple as a coworker sharing leftover pain medication with a buddy who hurt his back at work. That medication sharing may seem innocent enough, but it is actually one of the biggest drivers of the current epidemic of addiction and overdose.

Taking medication without the supervision of a doctor is always a risky thing to do, even if the medicine being shared is as harmless as an allergy pill. With something as powerful as a prescription opioid, the risks go up dramatically.

Even if someone you know is in pain, you should never share your prescription pain medication. You may think you are doing your friend a favor, but you could be putting them on the road to dependency and addiction.

Taking someone else's prescription pain medication can be just as dangerous. If you are experiencing pain that does not respond to over-the-counter pain relievers, you should call your doctor for a definitive diagnosis. Attempting to diagnose and treat yourself is always a bad idea, and when it comes to prescription opioids, it could be a deadly mistake.

Safe Storage and Disposal

One of the main drivers of the opioid crisis is legitimate prescription medications being sold on the streets illegally. In some cases, that happens when a friend shares their prescription with someone who is experiencing pain. However, the theft of prescription medications is another big problem. Thieves may break into homes and cars in search of prescriptions to sell, or they may rob pharmacies to get the drugs at the source. This allows prescription medications to enter the black market pipeline, where they fuel addiction and even take lives.

That is why the safe storage and disposal of prescription painkillers is so important. Whether you are taking prescription opioids for three days or three months, you should dispose of your unused medication in a proper manner.

Prescription drug takeback days give patients a chance to dispose of unwanted prescriptions. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), sponsors these drug takeback days, and they are typically held at local pharmacies and community centers.

If you are taking prescription pain medications on an ongoing basis to treat a chronic condition, those drugs should be stored carefully and securely. Leaving

these powerful medications out in the open could prove deadly to curious children and to teenagers who want to experiment with drugs. Medications should always be kept in a secured location, like a home safe or locked cabinet.

Consequences of Addiction

Once a person becomes addicted they are more willing to engage in risky behaviors to get what they feel they need. Once a legitimate prescription runs out users will seek other methods to feed their addiction. This may include theft or turning to the street for illegal pills. When the cost of street pills becomes too high, addicts often turn to heroin, which is a cheaper, but a more dangerous high. There is such a demand for opioids that drug dealers have begun "cutting" their supplies of heroin or creating counterfeit pills with stronger, deadlier synthetic opioids like fentanyl. When these drugs are consumed the risks of overdose and death is high. Being careful with the medications you are taking and avoiding the path to addiction is key to a healthy life.

Take Pills with Care!

To those in severe pain, the power of a prescription opioid medication can be a godsend. When properly used, these medications have the power to treat severe pain and help patients on the road to recovery. Unfortunately, the use of these powerful pain medications has its dark side. If you want to take prescription painkillers safely, you need to use them properly, dispose of them the right way and use them for the shortest possible amount of time.

