

Opioid Use Disorder

Opioids are powerful substances that relieve pain. Opioids include illegal drugs, such as heroin, as well as prescription pain medicines, such as codeine, morphine, hydrocodone, oxycodone, and fentanyl.

Opioid use disorder is when you take opioids for nonmedical reasons even though taking them hurts your health and well-being. Taking prescribed opioids regularly can lead to dependence, especially if you take them in larger amounts or more often than they should be taken. Opioid use disorder often disrupts life at home, work, or school. It can cause mental and physical problems. It also increases your risk of suicide and death from overdose.

What are the causes?

This condition is caused by taking opioids. Taking opioids repeatedly results in changes in the brain that make it hard to control opioid use. Many people develop this condition because they like the way they feel when they take opioids or because they get addicted to them.

What increases the risk?

This condition is more likely to develop in:

- People with a family history of opioid use disorder.
- People who misuse other drugs.
- People with a mental illness, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, or antisocial personality disorder.
- People who begin use at an early age, such as during their teen years.

What are the signs or symptoms?

Symptoms of this condition include:

- Taking greater amounts of an opioid than you want to or for longer than you want to.
- Trying several times to control your opioid use.
- Spending a lot of time getting opioids, using them, or recovering from their effects.
- Craving opioids.
- Having problems at work, at school, at home, or in a relationship because of opioid use.
- Giving up or cutting down on important life activities because of opioid use.
- Using opioids when it is dangerous, such as when driving a car.
- Continuing to use an opioid even though it has led to a physical problem, such as:
 - Severe constipation.
 - Poor nutrition.
 - Infertility.
 - Tuberculosis.
 - Aspiration pneumonia.
 - An infection, such as hepatitis or HIV (*human immunodeficiency virus*).
- Continuing to use an opioid even though it is causing a mental problem, such as:
 - Depression or anxiety.
 - Hallucinations.
 - Sleep problems.
 - Loss of interest in sex.
- Needing more and more of an opioid to get the same effect that you want from the opioid (building up a *tolerance*).

- Having symptoms of withdrawal when you stop using an opioid. Some symptoms of withdrawal are:
 - Depression or anxiety.
 - Irritability.
 - Nausea or vomiting.
 - Muscle aches or spasms.
 - Watery eyes.
 - Trouble sleeping.
 - Yawning.

How is this diagnosed?

This condition is diagnosed with an assessment. During the assessment, your health care provider will ask about your opioid use and how it affects your life.

Your health care provider may perform a physical exam or do lab tests to see if you have physical problems resulting from opioid use. Your health care provider may also screen for drug use and refer you to a mental health professional for evaluation.

How is this treated?

Treatment for this condition is usually provided by mental health professionals with training in substance use disorders. The first step in treatment is detoxification, which involves taking medicines to lessen withdrawal symptoms. Additional treatment may involve:



- Counseling. This treatment is also called talk therapy. It is provided by substance use treatment counselors. A counselor can address the reasons you use opioids and suggest ways to keep you from using opioids again. The goals of talk therapy are to:
 - Find healthy activities and ways to cope with stress.
 - Identify and avoid what triggers your opioid use.
 - Help you learn how to handle cravings.
- Support groups. Support groups are run by people who have quit using opioids. They provide emotional support, advice, and guidance.
- A medicine that blocks opioid receptors in your brain. This medicine can reduce opioid cravings that lead to relapse. This medicine also blocks the good feeling that you get from using opioids.
- Opioid maintenance treatment. This involves taking certain kinds of opioid medicines. These medicines satisfy cravings but are safer than commonly misused opioids. This is often the best option for people who continue to relapse with other treatments.

Follow these instructions at home:

- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- Check with your health care provider before starting any new medicines.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your health care provider. This is important.

Where to find more information

- National Institute on Drug Abuse: www.drugabuse.gov
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: www.samhsa.gov

Contact a health care provider if:

- You are not able to take your medicines as told.
- Your symptoms get worse.

Get help right away if:

- You may have taken too much of an opioid (*overdosed*).
- You have serious thoughts about hurting yourself or others.

If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. You can go to your nearest emergency department or call:

- **Your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).**
- **A suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. This is open 24 hours a day.**

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.