

Preventing overdoses and overdose deaths - Opioid treatment, part 4

If you or a loved one take opioid medication, there are things you can do to avoid an overdose:

- Take only the amount of medicine your doctor prescribed for you.
- Follow your doctor's instructions, and take your medicine on time
- Call a doctor if your pain gets worse
- Never mix pain medicines with alcohol, sleeping pills, or any illegal substances
- Store your medicine in a safe place where children or pets cannot reach it
- Talk to family and friends about opioid use and the risk of overdose. Discuss the warning signs, and what they can do to help prevent an overdose death



What does an overdose look like?



Know what to look for when an overdose happens. An opioid overdose requires medical help right away. There are three common symptoms with an opioid overdose.

- **Pinpoint pupils**

When you look in the person's eyes, you notice their pupils are very tiny. The pupil is the black center circle in the eye.

- **Unconsciousness**

The person is asleep. When you say their name or shake them, they will not wake up.

- **Respiratory depression**

The person's breathing is very slow or has stopped.

A person who has overdosed on opioids may also have blue looking fingernails, a slow heart rate, paleness, and make gurgling sounds in their throat.

If you think someone has overdosed:

- 1. Get medical help as soon as possible.**

Call 911 immediately. All you have to say is "Someone won't wake up and they are not breathing." Give a clear address or description of your location.



- 2. If the person is not breathing, use rescue breathing.**

Rescue breathing provides oxygen to a person's lungs. Rescue breathing has three steps:

1. Make sure nothing is in person's mouth.
2. Tilt their head back, lift chin, pinch nose shut.

3. Give one slow breath every five seconds until they start breathing or help arrives.

If available, 3. Use naloxone

This is the only medication that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. It is available in different forms including as an injection, as a nasal spray (Narcan) and as an auto-injector (Evzio).



4. Put the person on their side so they don't choke. Make sure their mouth is open.

5. Stay with the person until the ambulance arrives.

Good Samaritan Laws exist in many states. These laws protect the person helping another person who has overdosed. Don't hesitate to act if you suspect an opioid overdose. Your efforts could save a life.



People and their family members who are dealing with mental or substance use disorders, or both, can call the National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357. This is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service. It is available in English and Spanish. The National Helpline provides referrals to local treatment centers, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free brochures and other information.

Text is from opioid information sources from the Department of Health and Human Services and adapted by HealthReach and Healthy Roads Media. This project has been funded in whole or in part with Federal funds by the National Library of Medicine award number HHSN276201500011I awarded to the Center for Public Service Communications. Images from the Massachusetts State Department of Health and iStock.com.