Prescription opioids are used to treat some types of pain. Doctors sometimes prescribe opioid medications for short-term use after surgery or an injury. Prescription opioids can also help relieve pain for some patients with cancer or as part of end-of-life care.

In recent years, prescription opioids are increasingly used to treat chronic, non-cancer pain such as back pain or osteoarthritis. **Chronic pain** is pain that lasts a long time. Research is not clear if using opioids for chronic pain is an effective treatment. However, there is an increased awareness of risks associated with the long-term use of opioids.

Common prescription opioids include:
- Oxycodone, known as OxyContin, Percodan, or Percocet
- Hydrocodone, known as Vicodin, Lortab, or Lorcet
- Morphine
- Fentanyl, known as Duragesic
- Methadone
- Codeine

**Side Effects**
Even when they are taken as directed, prescription opioids can have serious side effects. Side effects can include:
- Increased sensitivity to pain, called **hyperalgesia**
- Constipation
- Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth
- Sleepiness and dizziness
- Confusion
- Depression
- Low levels of testosterone that can result in lower sex drive, energy, and strength
- Itching and sweating

**Risks**
There are always risks associated with any medication:
- **Tolerance** means you might need to take more and more of the medication to get the same pain relief.
• **Physical dependence** means you get uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms when the medication is stopped.

• **Abuse** is the repeated use of illegal drugs or the misuse of legal drugs to produce pleasure, lower stress, or alter reality.

• **Addiction** is a long-lasting disease with relapses that involves drug seeking and drug use, despite harmful effects.

• **Overdose** occurs when too much of a drug is taken, which causes injuries to the body.

**Before you take an opioid medication for your chronic pain:**

• Talk with your doctor about pain treatment options, including ones that do not involve prescription drugs.

• Tell your doctor about any past or current drug and alcohol use.

• Talk with your doctor about all the risks and benefits of taking prescription opioids.

Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about opioids or drug abuse. Your public health department, health care provider, and public library can help.