

Opioid pain medication management – Opioids, part 4

Doctors sometimes prescribe opioid medications to treat acute pain. **Acute pain** is pain that only lasts a short time, and can occur after surgery or an injury. When



starting opioids for acute pain, patients should take the lowest effective dosage. They should take it only if the pain is severe. This is usually three days or less.

Chronic pain is pain that lasts longer than expected, or pain that continues past the time of normal healing. In 2016, the CDC released new guidelines for doctors to help improve how opioids are prescribed for chronic pain.

Some of these guidelines are:

- The doctor should carefully assess the patient's pain.
- The doctor and patient should work together to set up pain treatment goals.
- Look at a wide range of pain treatments including opioid medications, over-the-counter pain medications, physical therapy, exercise therapy, and behavioral therapy.
- Within the first few weeks of starting the use of opioids for chronic pain, the doctor and patient should review the benefits and risks. This should also be done if an increased dose is being considered.
- The doctor and patient should talk often about pain treatment options, and weigh the benefits and risks of long-term opioid use.
- Overdose is a risk for anyone taking opioid medications. The doctor and patient should discuss having **naloxone**, known as Narcan or EVZIO, on hand. Naloxone is a medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose.



- A patient taking opioid medications needs to avoid many other kinds of drugs, including tranquilizers, sleeping pills, muscle relaxants, and alcohol.
- If the patient becomes dependent on opioid medication and is addicted, this is called **opioid use disorder**. The doctor and patient should talk about therapy and treatment programs that are available.

If you are prescribed opioids:

- Use them exactly as your doctor told you. Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed.
- Keep all of your doctor's appointments.
- Talk to your doctor about all side effects and concerns.

- Store opioid pain medications in a safe, secure place. Always keep them out of a child's reach.
- Do not sell or share prescription opioid pain medications.
- Never use another person's prescription opioids.
- Dispose of unused prescription opioids safely. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about community drug take-back programs.



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