

Are Opioids Doing More to You Than for You?

Opioids are pain medications such as Tylenol #3, Codeine, Percocet, OxyNeo, Tramacet, Morphine, Hydromorphone and Fentanyl. They can be effective in helping acute pain from broken bones or surgery. However, we are concerned about using opioids long term (over three to six months) for chronic pain. Since opioids will only improve your pain by 30%, it is more important for you to be able to function at a level where you can carry out your daily activities.

Opioids can cause many side effects that get worse with higher doses. These side effects include:

Tolerance – the medication becomes less effective over time.

Physical dependence – when the medication wears off you may feel withdrawal symptoms such as nausea, diarrhea, sweating, chills, flu-like symptoms, pain and anxiety.

Addiction – is a chronic disorder with biological, psychological, social and environmental factors influencing you to continue taking a medication to prevent craving and withdrawal symptoms.

Constipation – leads to nausea, poor appetite and bowel blockage.

Drowsiness – increases your risk of falls, broken bones, and car accidents, especially if combined with alcohol or other medications that also cause drowsiness.

Fatigue, low energy, and depression – affects your ability to work or do day to day activities.

Sleep apnea or impaired breathing while sleeping – contributes to daytime fatigue and poor thinking. This puts you at risk for many health conditions (including heart attacks and stroke) and increases your risk of having a car accident.

Low testosterone in men – low sex drive, low energy, depressed mood, slower recovery from muscle injuries and decreased bone density.

Low estrogen and progesterone in women – decreased bone density and low energy.

Opioid induced hyperalgesia – opioids make the pain worse, especially at higher doses. This frequently happens in patients with fibromyalgia or central sensitization (a process of constant “wind up” that keep your central nervous system on alert at all times).

If you are bothered by any of these side effects, or you are not able to do activities that are important to you, it may be time to discuss with your doctor whether a gradual lowering of your opioid dose and/or rotation to a different opioid, both of which are effective for many patients with chronic pain.

Talk with your physician today



This work by Mary Nelson is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

