American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists (aapp.org)

What to Know About Opioid Risks and Overdose

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- Prescription opioids are usually used to provide pain relief.
- Opioids should only be used as prescribed and should not be combined with other substances that cause sleepiness or slow your breathing.
- Signs of an overdose include slowed breathing, blue/grey lips, fingernails, and skin, and deep sleep.
- Naloxone is a medication that can treat opioid overdose when given right away.

What are opioids?

Opioids are a type of medication that includes prescription pain relievers, such as those listed below, and illegal drugs of abuse (e.g., heroin).[1]

Common opioid medications

- Codeine (Tylenol with Codeine #3®)
- Fentanyl (Duragesic®)
- Hydrocodone (Norco®, Lortab®)
- Hydromorphone (Dilaudid®)
- Methadone (Dolophine®, Methadose®)
- Morphine (MS Contin®, Kadian®)
- Oxycodone (OxyContin®, Percocet®)
- Oxymorphone (Opana®)

What are they used for?

Opioids can be used to treat pain following some injuries or surgery. They are typically used to treat severe pain that is not well controlled with non-opioid medications such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen. They are also called narcotics.[3]

What are the risks of opioid use?

- May cause drowsiness, making it dangerous to drive or operate heavy machinery.
- Taking too high of a dose or too many opioids can make a person pass out, stop breathing, and, in some situations, die.
- Opioids can be habit-forming and may lead to an opioid use disorder, especially with prolonged use.
- Tolerance to opioids can develop with regular use, which means that someone would need more of an opioid to feel the same pain relief.[3,4]
- If a person stops taking opioids, even for a few days, they can lose their tolerance. This may make them more likely to overdose if they take the same dose they used to take after being off opioids.

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How can opioids be used safely?

- DO NOT mix opioids with
  - Alcohol
  - Additional opioids
  - Benzodiazepines, like alprazolam (Xanax®), diazepam (Valium®), or lorazepam (Ativan®), unless directed by your provider
  - Other medications that make you sleepy
- Take the opioid medication exactly as directed
- Ask your provider or pharmacist if you have any questions or concerns!

How to safely dispose of opioid medications

- The best way to dispose of most types of unused, unwanted, or expired medicines is to drop them off at a drug take-back site, location, or program.
- Opioid prescriptions should not be flushed down the toilet or thrown away with your trash.
- For more information on proper medication disposal, please visit: https://www.fda.gov/drugs/safe-disposal-medicines/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know.

What is an opioid overdose?

- Opioid overdose occurs when a person takes more opioids than the body can handle, which may cause someone to pass out, have trouble breathing, and sometimes die.[4]
- Opioid overdose can happen within seconds to hours after taking opioids.
- Anyone taking opioids can have an accidental, life-threatening opioid overdose.

Signs of an opioid overdose[4]

- Dizziness and confusion
- Sleepiness
- Difficulties waking up
- Snoring, gurgling, or choking sounds
- Breathing is slow or has stopped
- Blue/grey lips, fingernails, or skin
- Limp body
- Deep sleep
- Person cannot be woken up
- Family members, friends, and roommates should receive training about what an opioid overdose looks like
- By recognizing opioid overdose early and acting quickly, lives can be saved

What is naloxone?

- Naloxone (Narcan®) is a medication to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose and helps a person start breathing again.[5]
- Naloxone is available as a nasal spray (Narcan®, Kloxxado®, ReVive®), and intramuscular injection (Zimhi®).
- Naloxone nasal spray is available from a pharmacist without a prescription from a doctor and is available over the counter. Ask your pharmacist!
- Family members, friends, and roommates should receive training on how to use naloxone.
- By giving naloxone, lives can be saved.

When should naloxone be used?

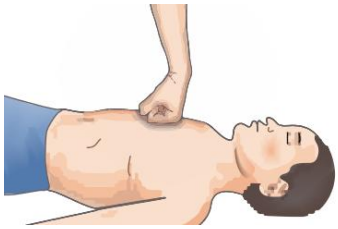
- Naloxone should be used right away if there are signs or symptoms of an opioid overdose.
- If a person shows signs of an overdose but you are not sure what they took, naloxone should still be given because an opioid overdose can cause severe injury or death.
- Naloxone is safe and will not hurt someone if they did not take an opioid.[5]
- Since the effects of opioids can often last longer than the effects of naloxone, it is important to also follow up with emergency medical care as soon as possible after the naloxone dose has been given.

How quickly does naloxone work?

- Naloxone works quickly, within 2 to 5 minutes.
- If a person does not respond to one dose of naloxone, a second dose can be given after 2-3 minutes.[5]

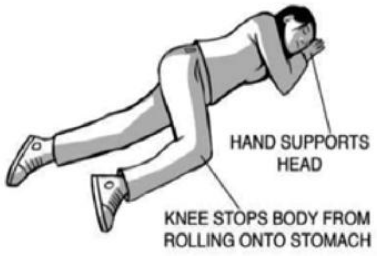
What if an overdose is suspected?

- Make sure the area is safe.
- Ask the person if he or she is okay.
  If they do not respond, shout their name. Shake their shoulders and try to wake them up.
- If they still do not respond, firmly rub the middle of the chest (use your knuckles on the bone in the center of the chest where the ribs connect).





- Call 911 or Emergency Services.
- Administer naloxone if you have it.
- Move the person to their side to prevent choking if the person vomits.
- If 2 – 3 minutes pass after the first dose and the person hasn't started breathing or responded to you, give a second dose
- If the person wakes up, try to keep them from falling back asleep.
- Stay with the person until help arrives.



The wake up

- When someone wakes up after receiving naloxone, they may not know what happened and may not feel well. Gently tell them what happened and that help is on the way to prevent them from becoming uncomfortable and confused.
- Continue to check for signs of an opioid overdose.
- If the person has slowed breathing, blue/grey lips, fingernails, and skin, and deep sleep, give a second dose if not already given.

Good Samaritan Law

- Many individuals may not call for medical assistance for fear of being arrested for carrying illegal substances or a history of drug-related crimes.
- The Good Samaritan Law creates legal protection for individuals who are misusing opioids, heroin, or other illegal substances and need medical attention for an opioid overdose.
- The Law also protects individuals who carry naloxone and use it in good faith to help someone experiencing an opioid overdose.
- Check to see the specific details of the Good Samaritan Law in your state: https://www.safeproject.us/good-samaritan-laws/

Go online to find more information and to view the references for this toolkit.

https://aapp.org/resource/patients

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