

SPRING 2017

Pain that lasts more than three months is considered chronic pain.



Chronic pain such as back pain and osteoarthritis is often treated with prescription opioids, however there can be serious risks when opioids are misused.

Check with your doctor before embarking on any new exercise program.

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## Managing Narcotics and Opioids for Chronic Pain

Opioids are narcotic pain medications typically used to treat both chronic pain and moderate to severe pain after injury or surgery. Examples of prescription opioids include:

- Oxycodone
- Hydrocodone
- Codeine
- Morphine
- Fentanyl
- and many others

Opioids work by attaching to receptors in your brain, spinal cord or other areas of your body to block the brain from receiving pain signals.

**Take your medications only as directed by your doctor! Do not share your medications with anyone!**



### Speaking with your Physician

Before you receive a prescription for opioids, speak to your doctor about:

- Alternative pain treatment options, including non-opioid medications, physical therapy and alternative treatments.
- Additional medicines you are currently taking, including prescription and over-the-counter drugs as well as herbal supplements.
- Past/current drug or alcohol use.

At your follow-up visit with your doctor, it is important to:

- Discuss your body's response to the pain medications.
- Discuss any side effects of the medications.
- Ask questions.

**As you recover from surgery, your opioid use should decrease. If you continue to experience severe pain and/or your opioid use increases, speak with your physician as soon as possible.**

### Tips on How to Store and Dispose of Medications

- Medications should be stored securely in their original containers.
- **Keep medications out of sight and out of children's reach, preferably in a locked cabinet or high shelf.**
- Dispose of medications immediately after your pain symptoms have resolved.
- Unused medications are best disposed of at your pharmacy or a take back facility—search for public disposal locations at <https://apps.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main>

**“Managing pain following surgery is an important part of recovery. Knowing some fundamental facts about how to properly use opioids is essential for your safety and wellbeing.”**

—Barbara Wukovits, RN, BSNC, BC, Director Pain Management Service, Department of Anesthesiology

### What are the possible side effects of taking prescription medications?

- Constipation
- Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth
- Sleepiness and dizziness
- Confusion
- Depression
- Itching and sweating

Tolerance can occur after taking an opioid for an extended period of time and your body needs more of the drug to experience pain relief.

Discuss with your doctor when you are ready to stop taking pain medication. Your doctor may slowly wean you off of the medication so as to avoid withdrawal symptoms such as:

- Diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting
- Muscle pain
- Anxiety
- Irritability

Opioids can be an effective treatment; however it is critical to use them safely and per your doctor's instructions.

Watch and learn through our HSS Webinars at [hss.edu/pped-webinars](http://hss.edu/pped-webinars). Topics include osteoarthritis, bone health, pain management, nutrition, research, self-management and exercise. Check out our HealthConnection newsletters at [hss.edu/healthconnection](http://hss.edu/healthconnection).