

Newsletter Article Copy: Option #1

6 Things to Know About Opioids

1. *Opioid use has become more common*

Opioids are drugs that your doctor may prescribe to relieve pain that results from an injury or cancer, or to manage pain after surgery. Common types include codeine, morphine and oxycodone. In the last 10 years, the use of opioids for treating non-cancer chronic pain (pain lasting longer than three months) has gone up a lot. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that between 1999 and 2014 the amount of prescribed opioids sold in the U.S. nearly quadrupled but the amount of pain reported by Americans remained unchanged.

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [What are opioids?](#) (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services)

2. *Opioid overdose is a growing problem among women*

According to the CDC, when compared to men, women are more likely to have chronic pain, be prescribed a pain killer, be given higher doses and use the drug longer. Women may also become dependent more quickly. Although men are still more likely to die from an overdose than women, the gap is closing. Since 1999, there has been a 400% increase in deaths from overdose of prescription pain killers among women compared to a 265% increase among men.

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [Prescription Painkiller Overdoses](#) (Centers for Disease Control - CDC)

3. *Opioids don't work well for long-term pain management*

Opioids were first used to manage short-term pain – after surgery, during recovery from an accident and in treating people dying of cancer. In the last decade, more doctors started to prescribe opioids for treating chronic conditions like low back pain, arthritis and osteoarthritis. But there is little data to support long-term use of opioids in these cases. And the side effects, which often include risks of abuse, addiction and overdose, most often outweigh the potential benefits.

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [Frequently Asked Questions About Opioids](#) (CDC) [Opioids Don't Beat Other Medications for Chronic Pain](#) (Health News from NPR)

[Click here](#) to review an overview of a 2018 study on this topic, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association

4. *There are serious risks even if you take the drug as prescribed*

Many people can use opioids safely for a short time. But long-term use often comes with a number of serious side effects even when the drug is taken as prescribed. These can include developing a tolerance (the body becomes used to the drug), and dependence (there are unpleasant withdrawal symptoms when drug is stopped). Be sure to discuss side effects and risks with your doctor so you know what to expect and ask about options to manage pain that don't involve opioids.

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [Prescription Opioids: What You Need to Know](#) (CDC)

5. *Half of all opioid overdoses involve a prescription*

According to the National Safety Council, 70% of doctors prescribe opioids for longer than the Centers for Disease Control recommends. Risk of overdose goes up when the drug is taken for long periods of time and at higher doses. If your doctor prescribes an opioid for you, ask for the lowest dose and the smallest number of pills. Tell your doctor about any other medicines you are taking and don't mix alcohol and opioids.

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [Talking with Your Medical Provider When You Are Prescribed an Opioid Painkiller](#), National Safety Council

6. *Chronic pain can often be well managed with non-drug options*

Although opioids can provide quick relief from pain in the short term, they come with serious side effects and risks. Talk with your doctor about pain relief options that don't involve drugs. Many of these are effective and have fewer risks. A review done by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health at the National Institutes of Health reported that some of the most popular complementary health approaches, including acupuncture, yoga and tai chi, can help patients manage some of the more common pain conditions.

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on:

[Nondrug approaches effective for treatment of common pain conditions](#) (Science Daily)
[8 Non-invasive pain relief techniques that really work](#) (Harvard Health Publishing)

Newsletter Article Copy: Option #2

Using opioids to manage pain: Be prepared, be safe

Even when prescribed by a doctor and taken as directed, using an opioid can cause side effects including constipation, nausea/vomiting, sleepiness and dizziness. Taking opioids also comes with the serious risk of addiction and even overdose. If you are prescribed an opioid to help manage your pain, there are steps you can take to be prepared and informed and lessen your risk of harm.

Be open and honest with your doctor

- Avoid mixing drugs, which can cause a bad reaction. Tell your doctor about any medicines you are taking, including herbs and over-the-counter drugs
- Talk about your medical and family history – certain conditions like COPD, sleep apnea, depression and a history of addiction may increase the risks that come with taking an opioid to relieve pain
- Ask for the lowest dose of the drug and the smallest number of pills possible
- Speak up if your pain is not controlled by the dose prescribed
- Report any side effects – most can be relieved or treated

Follow your doctor's directions

- Take the prescribed dose of the drug as often as directed by your doctor; do not make changes to either of these on your own
- Do not drink alcohol or drive while taking opioids
- Never share your prescription drugs with others
- Follow up often with your doctor or health care team

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [How to use opioids safely](#) (Mayo Clinic)

Talk to your doctor about non-opioid options

- Try drugs like aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen before using prescription opioids
- Discuss using a complementary approach like acupuncture, tai chi, yoga and massage therapy
- These options, either alone or combined, can often manage pain as effectively as opioids, with fewer side effects and risks

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [What the Science Says About Complementary Approaches for Chronic Pain](#) (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health)

Know the signs of an overdose

The Centers for Disease Control reports that 115 people in the U.S. die every day from opioid overdose. This does not always happen because a person misuses or abuses the drug on purpose. It can happen when someone doesn't understand the doctor's directions about how much of the drug to take or how often. Opioid overdose is a life threatening emergency. If you see these symptoms in someone you know, seek emergency help right away:

- Small "pinpoint" pupils
- Unable to stay awake or loss of consciousness
- Pale, blue or clammy skin; blue fingernails and lips
- Slow, shallow breathing or trouble breathing
- Limp or lifeless body
- Slow or stopped heart rate

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [Preventing an Opioid Overdose](#) (CDC)

Newsletter Article Copy: Option #3

Manage pain without prescription drugs

Millions of Americans live with chronic pain, which has led to a lot more prescription opioids being taken for problems such as back pain, arthritis and osteoarthritis – even though there is no proof that it helps in most cases. Although this class of drug can help manage short-term pain, the possible side effects and serious risks, including opioid use disorder and overdose, likely outweigh the benefits of long-term use of these drugs.

When should opioids be used to manage chronic pain?

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says that doctors should consider prescription opioids only if the benefits to pain and day-to-day function outweigh the risks related to use of the drug. For chronic pain, non-opioid and non-drug options are the preferred first line for treatment. If opioids are used, the lowest possible dose should be used to reduce risks.

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain](#)

What non-opioid, non-drug options should be considered?

Aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen treat both pain and inflammation, so they can be helpful in dealing with many problems. Other ways to manage pain that don't involve opioids include physical therapy, exercise and complementary health care.

What is complementary health care?

When non-mainstream health care products and practices are used with traditional Western medicine, it is known as a complementary health care approach. This means using both non-drug options along with traditional medicine for treating chronic pain.

What are some examples of complementary approaches?

There are two main types of complementary health care: Mind and body practices, which involve a specialist trained in the area (e.g. massage therapy, acupuncture, yoga); and natural products, which include vitamins and minerals, herbs and probiotics.

Do many people use this type of approach?

More than 30% of adults in the U.S. use complementary health care. Yoga, chiropractic manipulation, meditation and massage therapy are among the most popular mind and body practices.

How effective is this type of approach for managing pain?

Recent research found that acupuncture, yoga, tai chi, massage therapy and relaxation techniques had more positive than negative results in helping patients manage the pain that comes with osteoarthritis of the knee, neck and back pain, and headaches including migraines.

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [Review Examines Clinical Trial Evidence on Complementary Approaches for Five Painful Conditions](#) (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health – NCCIH)

When adding complementary health care to a treatment plan, what should you consider?

- Products or practices that are not backed by science should not be used in place of traditional health care; talk with your doctor about how non-drug options might fit into your treatment plan
- Take the time to learn about how the different non-drug options work and whether each product or practice you are looking at has a proven track record
- For treatment options that involve a practitioner (e.g. acupuncture and massage therapy), ask a trusted source for a referral and learn about their training and whether they have experience working with your condition or issue
- Be sure to tell your doctor about any complementary health approach you are using or are thinking about using

For e-version, add: To learn more, click on [If You Are Considering Complementary Health Approaches for Chronic Pain](#) (NCCIH)