

# Get the facts about prescription opioids



**228**

people in Delaware died of drug-related deaths in 2015. Many of those deaths were related to prescription drugs.

Almost **2 million**

Americans abused or were dependent on prescription opioids in 2014.

As many as **1 in 4**

people who receive prescription opioids long term for non-cancer pain in primary care settings struggle with addiction.

## What are opioids?

Opioids are drugs that block pain signals to the brain and have very serious side effects. Commonly prescribed opioids include **hydrocodone, oxycodone, codeine, morphine and fentanyl**. Heroin is also an opioid.

Opioids aren't made for long-term use; the more you use them, the more your body builds a tolerance. You'll have the same level of pain, but need more opioids – increasing your chances of overdose or addiction. Long-term use of opioids can be appropriate for some patients receiving active cancer treatment, palliative care, and/or end-of-life care.

## What are the dangers of opioids?

- Opioid medications are addictive.
- Overdosing on opioids can happen by accident.
- Opioids can cause significant side effects, including: **Constipation, nausea, vomiting, dry mouth, sleepiness, dizziness, confusion, and increased sensitivity to pain.**

## What are the alternatives for pain management?

- Rehabilitation services and physical therapy
- Therapy and relaxation techniques
- Exercise and strength training
- Non-opioid medications: acetaminophen; non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs); serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs); tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs)



## How do I take opioids?

- Start low and go slow – your prescriber should give you the lowest dose for the shortest amount of time possible.
- Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed – otherwise addiction or overdose become more likely.
- Do not share your prescription medications with anyone. It is both illegal and unsafe.
- Avoid taking opioids with alcohol. Mixing can increase your risk of overdose.
- Avoid mixing opioids with the following medications when possible (unless otherwise advised by your prescriber): **Sedatives or tranquilizers, including benzodiazepines (i.e. Xanax and Valium); muscle relaxants (i.e. Soma or Flexeril) sleeping pills or hypnotics (i.e. Ambien or Lunesta); other prescription opioid pain relievers.**
- There may be circumstances where prescribing opioids with these medication is necessary and acceptable. Also, your prescriber may use urine drug tests and check your prescription history to help make prescribing decisions that ensure your safety.
- Follow up regularly with your healthcare professional to monitor how the medication is working, side effects, or signs of opioid use disorder (like addiction).
- If you're taking opioids for an extended period of time, you should taper – with the guidance of your health care professional – as your pain subsides until you're off opioids completely. If you're taking high doses or long-term opioids, consider having naloxone on hand.

## How should I store and dispose of my medications?

- Lock all medications up or put them out of the way of anyone, including children or pets, who might try to consume them by accident or on purpose.
- Safely dispose of any unused medications at one of 14 Delaware prescription medication drop boxes. For a complete list of locations, visit [www.DelawareHealthyHomes.org](http://www.DelawareHealthyHomes.org).

If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction, call the 24/7 Crisis Hotline at:

New Castle County: 800-652-2929 Kent and Sussex counties: 800-345-6785

For more information, find an online guide to prevention, treatment, and recovery resources at [www.HelpisHereDE.com](http://www.HelpisHereDE.com).



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