



Prescription Opioids: What You Need to Know

Prescription opioids can be used to help relieve moderate to severe pain and are sometimes prescribed following surgery or injury, or for certain painful health conditions. These medications can be an important part of treatment, but they also come with **serious risks**. It is important to work with your clinician to get the safest, most effective care for you and your baby.



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Prescription opioids carry serious risks of dependence and overdose, especially with prolonged use. An opioid overdose, often marked by slowed breathing, can cause sudden death to you and your unborn baby. The use of prescription opioids can have a number of **side effects** as well, even when taken as directed, including:

- ▶ **Tolerance** — meaning you might need to take more of your opioid medication for the same pain relief
- ▶ **Constipation**
- ▶ **Increased sensitivity to pain**
- ▶ **Lower energy, strength, and sex drive** due to low levels of testosterone
- ▶ **Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth**
- ▶ **Physical dependence** — meaning you have symptoms of withdrawal when your opioid medication is stopped
- ▶ **Sleepiness and dizziness**
- ▶ **Confusion**
- ▶ **Depression**
- ▶ **Itching and sweating**

Facts

- ▶ As many as **1 in 4** people receiving prescription opioids long term in a primary care setting struggle with opioid use disorder. In fact, the prevalence of pregnant women with opioid use disorder has more than quadrupled in the past 20 years.
- ▶ It only takes **fewer than 7 days** of opioid therapy to develop a long-term opioid use disorder.

Risks

Risks are greater with:

- ▶ Mental health conditions (such as depression or anxiety)
- ▶ Personal or family history of drug misuse, substance use disorder, or overdose
- ▶ Older age (65 years or older)
- ▶ Sleep apnea or organ dysfunction

Avoid alcohol while taking prescription opioids. Also, unless specifically advised by your clinician, avoid certain medications:

- ▶ Benzodiazepines (such as Xanax or Valium)
- ▶ Muscle relaxants (such as Soma or Flexeril)
- ▶ Hypnotics (such as Ambien or Lunesta)
- ▶ Other prescription opioids