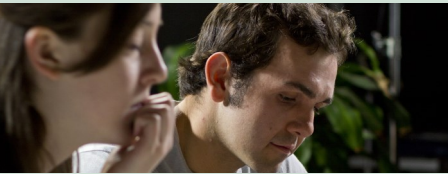


## Reducing Harm & Finding Help, Cont.

People who wish to stop using opioids should be aware that withdrawal will occur, but that it does not always need to be medically-supervised. However, physicians, detox facilities, and addiction treatment programs can help with withdrawal. Treatment for opioid addiction may include medications and counseling. Effective medications, used along with treatment, include methadone,

buprenorphine (Suboxone, Subutex, Bunavail and Probuphine), and naltrexone (ReVia, Depade, and Vivitrol Extended Release). These drugs can help to manage drug Cravings and withdrawal symptoms. Effective types of counseling for opioid



addiction include cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, and twelve-step facilitation. Opioid addiction can be treated in a residential setting (often called “rehab”) or in an outpatient setting (when the patient lives at home, but goes to treatment appointments 1-7 times per week).

There are also recovery support groups and online forums that can help people struggling with opioid addiction. Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, and groups like SMART Recovery or LifeRing are all available to support people with opioid addiction. Recovery apps specific to opioid addiction can be downloaded to your smart phone that provide lists of recovery support meetings, reading material, tools like sobriety counters, and more.

# Opioids



## Information about Your Health



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## Opioids such as Heroin – What Are They?

Opioids come in many forms with many different names, but they all have similar effects on the body and a similar potential for harm. All opioids are Central Nervous System (CNS) depressants. That means they that slow down the brain and body.

Some are medications prescribed for pain relief. These are most often in pill form, but also include some cough syrups. Common brand names for prescription opioids are Vicodin, Percocet, Norco, and OxyContin. Heroin is an illegal opioid made from morphine, a natural substance taken from the seed pod of the opium poppy plant. Heroin is a white or brown powder or a black/dark brown sticky substance. Opioids are swallowed, injected, smoked, or snorted.

## Opioids & My Health

### Shorter Term

*Intoxication:* Opioids can cause upset stomach and vomiting. Your heart rate and breathing may slow down. Thoughts and reactions can be cloudy and confused.

*Overdose:* More of an opioid than your body can handle causes an overdose,



## Opioids & My Health, Cont.

which can be fatal. Overdose is more likely to occur when opioids are combined with other CNS depressants like benzodiazepines (such as Xanax) or alcohol. The combined effect of these drugs can stop your breathing. Mixing cocaine with heroin, called speedballing, is responsible for more drug overdoses than using heroin alone.

*Unknown drugs:* Because some opioids are illegal, they carry additional risks. Users of heroin cannot be sure of the drug's contents or dose. Heroin can be cut with powerful drugs that massively increase overdose risk. Prescription opioids that are not prescribed by a doctor carry similar risks: you cannot be sure of a drug's content if someone gives or sells it to you.

### Longer Term

*Addiction:* Opioids have addictive potential. Not everyone who uses opioids becomes addicted, but some do. Opioid use over time leads to physical dependence, which means you may experience withdrawal symptoms if you try to stop. Withdrawal symptoms include muscle and bone pain, vomiting, chills, and trouble sleeping. On rare occasions, withdrawal can be life-threatening.

*Other health issues:* Long term opioid use is associated with constipation, reduced sex drive, and increased sensitivity to pain. Chronic use of opioids can reduce their effectiveness at managing pain after surgery and/or severe injuries. In addition, people who inject opioids and share injection equipment are more likely to develop diseases (such as HIV and hepatitis B or C) or injection site infections, some of which can be life-threatening. Injecting opioids can also damage your veins.

## Reducing Harm & Finding Help

Many people use prescription opioids safely and as they are prescribed. If you have health concerns related to an opioid prescription, talk with your doctor. There are other approaches to treating pain.



People who use opioids can reduce their risk of harm by being educated about what drugs they are taking. They can avoid mixing opioids with other drugs, especially alcohol and benzodiazepines. This is important because most overdose deaths involve more than one drug. Finally, people who inject opioids can use new syringes and other injection equipment.

Information on safe injection techniques, preventing drug overdoses and reducing drug-related harm for opioid users can be downloaded from the Harm Reduction Coalition website.

<http://harmreduction.org>

If it is available in your state, naloxone (often sold under the brand name Narcan) is a valuable tool for people who use opioids. Naloxone reverses opioid overdoses. It can be injected into a muscle or sprayed into the nose with a nasal spray device. Naloxone may be available through your primary care provider, pharmacy, or local needle exchange.