

## Alternatives to Opioids

*Alternative pain management options offer patients an effective and safe way to treat pain.*

Pain is an inevitable part of the human experience, and over the last several years, Americans have become acutely aware of the risks associated with opioids that have been prescribed to treat their pain.

Opioids are a class of drugs commonly used to reduce pain. The illegal drug heroin is an opioid, as are many of the prescription pain relievers prescribed by doctors, including oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine and others.

Opioids can negatively affect the reward center in the brain, causing users to need more and more over time. As a result, the drug can be highly addictive.

One of the best ways to prevent opioid misuse is to avoid the powerful drug altogether. Many people don't know there are options that might actually work better than prescription opioids for reducing and managing pain — with fewer risks and side effects.

If a doctor prescribes you or a loved one an opioid prescription, don't hesitate to ask questions and discuss your options. As an alternative to using opioids for treating pain, you might:

- **Try a milder pain reliever first.** Opioids aren't the only prescription drugs on the market. Over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) have fewer risks than opioids, and depending on your type of pain, could be better for finding relief.
- **Talk with a behavioral health provider.** Psychological strategies — such as cognitive behavioral therapy — could help you learn to recognize and modify physical, behavioral and emotional triggers that cause pain and stress.
- **Turn to other therapies.** Physical therapy or other therapies such as acupuncture or massage can be highly effective. A healthy diet and regular exercise have also been known to reduce chronic pain for many people.

If you and your doctor determine an opioid prescription is necessary after discussing the risks and alternatives, there are still many steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones from misuse.

- **Request the lowest dose for the shortest possible time.** This can be a good way to ensure you are getting relief from your pain in the safest way possible, and that you won't have leftover pills in your home. Ask your provider to prescribe a small number of opioids until you can switch to a milder pain reliever to manage your pain.
- **Lock up your prescription medications in a drawer, safe or other locking device** while you are still taking them. Nearly half of people misusing pain relievers, including prescription opioids, get them from a friend or family member.
- **Identify safe medication disposal options in your community.** As soon as you no longer need them, dispose of unused pills safely at a take-back location near you. Visit [MedTakeBackWashington.org](http://MedTakeBackWashington.org) to find a location near you or order a free safe medication return envelope.

When it comes to preventing opioid misuse, you can make a difference. One honest conversation with your doctor about alternatives to managing pain can help keep you and your family safe.

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