



## **A guide to responsible opioid use**

Opioid pain medications like oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, and morphine can be highly addictive. Before you take opioids, know how to take them responsibly.

### **Know how much pain you can tolerate.**

Pain is a normal part of the healing process. The goal is not 100 percent pain relief but ensuring you can still function with your pain while you heal. If you can't walk, sleep, eat or take deep breaths, that's when opioids and pain-relief interventions can play an important role. Ask yourself if your pain level is manageable for you. You know your body — and what pain levels you can tolerate — better than anyone. Tell your doctor how painful your pain is on a scale of 1–10. This will help your doctor make the best recommendation. A low dose of opioid medication for a short duration can be an effective treatment for acute pain. But, because they are highly addictive, opioids are not always recommended for the treatment of chronic pain.

### **Ask your doctor for the lowest dose of opioids for the shortest possible time.**

Many patients find relief from a low dose of opioid medication. If you feel you don't need the full prescription, stop taking the medication and safely dispose of it by visiting [MedTakeBackWashington.org](https://www.MedTakeBackWashington.org) to find a safe disposal kiosk nearby. If you feel you need a second dose, talk to your doctor, and together, you can discuss how best to manage your pain. Follow your prescription. Take the opioid medication exactly as outlined by your doctor. Remember: take opioids only when in pain. If you have a question, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Not following the instructions exactly could lead to overdose and even death.

### **Do your part to prevent opioid misuse.**

Lock up your opioid medication at home. It can be a cabinet or drawer that has a lock. You can also use a medication locking bag. They can be ordered online or purchased from some pharmacies. Safely dispose of unused, expired, or unwanted medications to prevent misuse by a friend or family member. You can return your medications to a participating pharmacy or visit [MedTakeBackWashington.org](https://www.MedTakeBackWashington.org) to find a safe disposal kiosk nearby.

### **Know the risk of taking opioids.**

Any opioid can negatively affect the reward center in the brain over time, making these drugs highly addictive. Opioid medication might not be a viable option for you, depending on your medical condition and overall health. Talk to your doctor about alternative ways to manage the pain.

**Opioids aren't the only way — or always the best way — to manage pain. Ask your doctor about these other pain relief options:**

- Movement: walking, stretching, exercising, yoga, tai chi.



- Over-the-counter medications: ask your doctor if over-the-counter medications like acetaminophen or ibuprofen can help.
- Heat and cold therapies: heating pads, ice packs, the RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation) method.
- Spending time in nature: short walk if permissible, bird watching, take deep breaths and smell the fresh air.
- Distracting the mind: making art, reading, listening to music or podcasts, watching TV, doing puzzles.
- Apps for meditation or pain management: Headspace, Insight Timer, Curable.
- Alternate therapies: physical therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral health services, massage, acupuncture.
- Chronic pain: best managed with a primary care provider and/or specialist.