

## DrugSolutions

# Opioid prescriptions – what you need to know

If you or one of your dependants have been prescribed an opioid for pain management, we have some helpful information that you can go over.

## What are opioids?

Opioids (or narcotics) are medications used to help with pain management. Some common opioids are:

- Codeine
- Oxycodone
- Hydromorphone
- Fentanyl
- Tylenol 3
- Percocet
- Morphine



Both short- and long-term use of opioids have a place in many people's treatment plan. Opioids can assist with pain reduction and improvement in activities of daily living.

## What's chronic pain?

Chronic pain is pain that lasts longer than three months<sup>1</sup>. It's a highly personal experience. Some people have pain that comes and goes. Others have pain that lasts for 12 hours in a day or longer.

Chronic pain is a physical and emotional experience. It's a disease – not a symptom.

There are a few reasons you might experience chronic pain, including:



Identifiable sources, such as surgery or a physical injury



Medical conditions, like inflammation from arthritis



Abnormal pain processing, such as fibromyalgia<sup>2</sup>

## What are the risks of opioid use?

Using opioids can come with a variety of risks and complications<sup>3</sup>, such as:

- Constipation
- Drowsiness
- Sexual dysfunction
- Changes in hormones<sup>4</sup>
- Infertility
- Liver damage
- Addiction

Opioid toxicity can be very dangerous, causing an average of 20 deaths per day in Canada<sup>5</sup>.

Your ideal dose should give you pain relief with the lowest level of risk. Over time, you can develop a tolerance to opioids, lowering their effectiveness and increasing the risk of dependence. Opioid treatment doesn't work for all kinds of pain and may not address underlying conditions.

It's normal to experience withdrawal when you reduce or stop taking opioids. Make sure you have support from your health care provider when it's time to reduce your opioid dosages to minimize withdrawal symptoms.





## Are there alternatives to opioids?

Depending on your condition, medication may only be one part of a complete treatment plan<sup>6</sup>.

Additional treatments may include:

- **Non-opioid medications**, like acetaminophen or other prescription medications
- **Physical rehabilitation**, such as physiotherapy, massage therapy or yoga
- **Psychological support**, like cognitive behavioural therapy and education sessions
- **Self-management**, such as healthy eating and sleeping patterns, meditation or support groups

Sign in to [mycanadalifeatwork.com](https://mycanadalifeatwork.com) to see the options your plan covers.

## Want to learn more?

For more information about opioid treatment, contact your health care provider.

1-800-957-9777 | [canadalife.com](https://canadalife.com)

<sup>1</sup> [About Chronic Pain](#), Government of Canada

<sup>2</sup> [About Chronic Pain](#), Government of Canada

<sup>3</sup> [Short-term and long-term effects of Opioids](#), Government of Canada

<sup>4</sup> [Prescription Opioids](#), the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction

<sup>5</sup> [Opioid- and Stimulant-related Harms in Canada](#), June 2023, Government of Canada

<sup>6</sup> [Treatments and Therapies for Chronic Pain](#), Government of Canada