



# 5-minute safety talk

## Common Risks at Work Due to Opioid Painkiller Use

You may be prescribed an opioid painkiller for an injury, surgery or ongoing pain. It's important to be an informed consumer about how the use of this medication may impact your safety at work.

### Common Opioid Side Effects

Common side effects include dizziness, sleepiness, upset stomach or constipation, blurred vision or dry mouth. In addition to these side effects, studies have shown that opioid painkillers may impair your thinking and reactions. In some people, opioid use can cause confusion, unusual thoughts, impulsive behavior, delayed reaction or difficulty in following directions.

### Opioids May Affect your Ability to Work or Drive Safely

Dizziness or severe sleepiness can cause falls, vehicle crashes or contribute to other safety incidents. One study determined that opioid use increased the risk of committing an unsafe driving act. Opioid use can lead to serious errors when performing job tasks which require focus, attention to detail or the need to react quickly.

### Changes in Opioid Dose Increase your Risk at Work

Research has shown that there is a greater risk of impairment when first starting to take opioids, when your dose increases or if you also use other drugs or substances such as anti-anxiety medicines or alcohol. It is important to note that people who use opioids for nonmedical purposes frequently increase the amount of opioids they take. Nonmedical use includes taking more than the prescribed dose or taking it for the feeling it causes or to "get high." Many workplaces have policy that bans nonmedical use of prescription medicines and drug tests include prescription drugs to reduce the potential safety risks.

### Staying Safe At Work

It is important to inform your physician if you have a safety sensitive job, or are responsible for work where impairment may create an unsafe situation. Discuss how opioid painkillers may effect your ability to drive or perform your work safely and effectively.

### Ask for non-opioid alternatives

There are several non-opioid pain relievers. Ask your doctor if a non-opioid alternative can be prescribed. Many non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are as effective in relieving pain as opioids. If not, ask your doctor to limit the dose and the length of time you take the medication.

### Use personnel policies

Consider using your company personnel benefits such as sick leave or short-term disability while using opioids.

### Request a temporary change of job duties

Inform your supervisor about your use of this medication. Request a job accommodation or change in your work assignments.

### Follow your workplace policy

Be sure to understand the part of your workplace policy that talks about prescription drug use. At many companies, taking prescription medicines in doses higher than prescribed or without a current prescription may result in a positive drug test and disciplinary action. Work with your employer to reduce any potential safety risk if prescription use is necessary.

It is important to understand the risks of opioid use and how it may affect your work. If prescription opioids are recommended, know the alternatives, understand the safety risks and work with your medical provider about your concerns. You should also understand your employer's policy and what to do if the safety and effectiveness of your work may be affected.



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