



5-minute safety talk

Discussing Prescription Opioid Painkillers with Your Doctor

In the unfortunate event of an injury, accident, surgery or other medical condition, your medical provider may recommend an opioid prescription painkiller for you or a family member. It's important to be prepared to discuss this choice of medicine, as there are certain risks when taking opioids that might be able to be avoided. Opioid medications are drugs prescribed for pain; unfortunately they can cause impairment, be addictive and often are over-prescribed.

Ask Your Doctor If There Is A Non-Opioid Alternative

Non-opioid medications have been shown to be just as effective as opioid medications like Percocet or Vicodin. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) including ibuprofen and naproxen treat pain just as well as opioids and have less side-effects and risks associated with taking them.

If Opioids Are Necessary, Request a Short Term Prescription

Some doctors may think that you need other medication in addition to NSAIDs or may feel that NSAIDs should not be used in your case. If this is the case, ask if a 3-day prescription is appropriate. Often, even a 7-10 day supply of opioids is seldom necessary.

Be Sure to Tell Your Provider If You Have These Medical Conditions

The following medical conditions may increase the health risks associated with taking opioid painkillers:

- COPD-(chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Sleep apnea
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Personal or family history of addiction
- Chronic constipation

Other Important Issues to Discuss With Your Medical Provider

Can I continue working if I am taking an opioid medication?

Talk to your medical provider about the nature of your work and if you are in a safety sensitive role that could be affected by impairment. People react differently to these medications and its important to know your workplace policy for prescription drug use.

Can I drive if I am taking an opioid medication?

State laws vary regarding driving while under the influence of even a legitimately prescribed medication. Ask your provider what is recommended in terms guidelines on use of this medication and operating a vehicle safely. Workplace safety policies generally prohibit use of drugs that cause any impairment, be sure to review your employer's policy and your responsibilities.

Can I take my sleeping pill or anti-anxiety medication with a prescription opioid?

Talk to your provider about any other medications you are taking. Sleeping pills and anti-anxiety medications are examples of ones that should not be combined with opioid painkillers.

If you are taking this after an injury, will taking opioids delay your recovery?

Studies have shown that opioid pain relievers may delay recovery and increase your risk of permanent disability.

If surgery is expected, how will this affect the outcome?

Opioid medications may delay your recovery from orthopedic surgery.

How can I know if these pills are causing me to experience MORE pain?

Longer term use of opioid medications can cause a condition called opioid hyperalgesia where your experience of pain actually increases. Ask your doctor if this common complication may be affecting you.

Safety is an important concern when it comes to use of prescription drugs. Making good use of your office visit at the point of prescribing enables you to get key information about pain medications, the risks, and your options as a consumer.



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