



# ARE YOU TAKING OPIOIDS FOR PAIN?

## 5 TOPICS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Although more than **300 million** opioid prescriptions are written each year, many people may feel conflicted about taking them. If your doctor recommends the use of prescription opioids – usually in combination with other therapies – for the management of pain, you may have questions about what to expect.

### ASK WHY AM I BEING PRESCRIBED OPIOIDS?

Some doctors assume that patients want the strongest and most effective pain relief and, therefore, prescribe opioids. But there are many other medication and non-medication options, so ask your doctor if other pain relief methods might be effective for you.

If you and your doctor decide that opioids are the best option, ask how long you will be taking them. In most cases, opioids are most beneficial for short-term moderate to severe pain – such as a few days after surgery or an injury. If you continue to have pain after that period, ask your physician about alternatives (see below).



It is important to have an open discussion about the choice to start opioids for treating pain.

#### BE SURE TO ASK

How long will I be taking opioids?  
What other types of therapies will I be trialing, in addition to the opioids?

### ACTIVITY GOALS

#### WILL OPIOIDS AFFECT MY QUALITY OF LIFE?

What is your “Pain Quotient”? Defining your threshold to tolerate pain and understanding your expectations of pain control is crucial to discuss with your doctor. Your clinician can help you understand where your baseline pain level is on a daily basis and set actionable goals to improve your long-term results.

Note that opioid therapy can result in many side effects. The most common effects include constipation, mental fogginess, nausea, and depression, which may require further evaluation and treatment to address properly.



#### BE SURE TO ASK...

What's the best way to rate my pain day-to-day so that I can judge improvements?  
What side effects can I expect? Are there any potential drug interactions with my current medications?

### ADVERSE EVENTS

#### SHOULD I HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT STARTING OPIOIDS – OR STOPPING THEM?

It's important to talk to your physician about any concerns you may have regarding adverse events, such as overdose, drug dependence, or addiction (opioid use disorder). In addition, your doctor should share with you how to safely store and dispose of unused opioid medications.

#### BE SURE TO ASK...

About obtaining a co-prescription for naloxone, a drug that can reverse an opioid overdose if injected quickly enough, in case of emergency. When it is time to end your prescription opioid therapy, ask your doctor about a tapering plan which helps to reduce your dosage slowly over a period of weeks or months to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

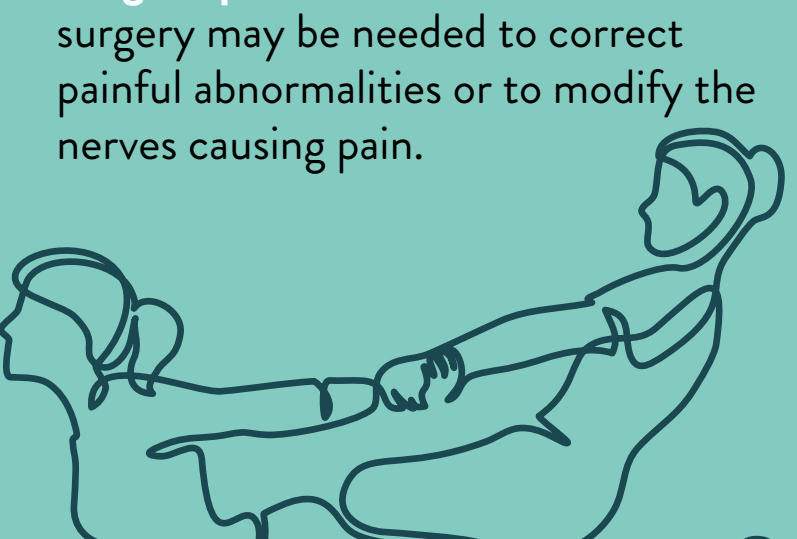


### ALTERNATIVES

#### WHAT ARE MY OTHER TREATMENT OPTIONS?

- Ask your doctor whether these options may be right for managing your pain:
- **Injections or nerve blocks:** Using local anesthetics, these medications and interventional therapies work to short circuit muscle and nerve pain.
  - **Electrical stimulation, including TENS units and spinal cord stimulators:** These therapies involve devices, sometimes implanted into the spine, that send electrical impulses to your body to block pain signals.
  - **Physical therapy, including rehabilitation exercises, whirlpools, ultrasound, and massage:** This type of therapy strengthens muscles to improve function and decrease pain.

- **Acupuncture:** Very thin needles placed in various parts of the body can interrupt pain signals.
- **Biofeedback, counseling, meditation, deep breathing, and relaxation:** These methods can ease pain by controlling involuntary functions such as muscle tension.
- **Surgical procedures:** In some cases, surgery may be needed to correct painful abnormalities or to modify the nerves causing pain.



### ACTION PLAN

#### WHAT IS THE LONG-TERM PLAN TO MANAGE MY PAIN?

Discuss with your doctor the long-term plan to address your pain. For instance, how long will you be on opioid therapy? When and how will alternative treatment methods be integrated? Will you be referred to other specialists? Overall, the plan should aim to meet your functional goals so that you can work and/or participate in daily activities. While chronic pain may not resolve entirely, the right treatment can improve your quality of life.

#### BE SURE TO ASK...

If your doctor can share your care plan with your close family members so they know what to expect.



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