

Narcotic Pain Medication Policy

Pain medications are helpful around the time of surgery, but they can cause problems if taken for too long. The goal is to try to get you off of the medications by 3-4 weeks or earlier, if possible. Some people may need medications for longer than 3-4 weeks, and that's ok, but try to wean yourself off of them if you can. **After the first 3 weeks, any refills of narcotic pain medications will need to be managed by your PCP or pain management doctor.**

The long-term use of such substances as opioids (narcotic analgesics), benzodiazepine tranquilizers, and barbiturate sedatives is controversial because of uncertainty regarding the extent to which they actually improve the lives of those receiving it in long term use. Some people receive prolonged benefit and others do not. Some may actually have an increase in pain. There is also the risk of an addictive disorder developing or of relapse occurring in a person with a prior addiction. The extent of this risk is not certain.

It is important that you know the side effects of these medications. While they are generally not toxic to such organs as liver, kidneys, and heart, excessive doses suppress breathing and may be fatal. This is especially true if the person is a child. Toxicity is much more likely if the drug is combined with tranquilizers or sedatives, so you must never do this. Drowsiness and impaired concentration may create danger with driving or operating machinery, especially shortly after dose increases. Some people describe lasting feelings of reduced alertness and concentration. The side effect that is most common and that does not improve over time is constipation. Stool softeners or other agents are required. If these drugs are taken during the latter months of pregnancy, the child will probably be born physically dependent on them.

Many deaths have occurred because of abuse of these medications, often by people other than those for whom they were prescribed, or because of combining them with other substances. Therefore, strict accountability is necessary. The following policies are agreed to by the treatment recipient.

Selling or giving away this medication is against the law and may cause harm or death to the person who receives it. Thus ,you must never give controlled substances to anyone else, even if he or she has the same symptoms as you.

It is equally important that you secure your medications so that no one else can access them. Workers in the home, friends of children, and visitors can be expected to look through medicine cabinets and take drugs of abuse. Medications should not be left in sight in hotel rooms, unoccupied cars, etc. Deaths have resulted when prescribed opioids were taken by others. Should a child accidentally ingest one of your pills, obtain emergency medical care immediately.

Are there any risks in taking these opiate medicines? Opioid pain medicine can help you but it can also cause side effects as well.

The risks include, but are not limited to:

- Addiction
- Overdose
- Breathing problems including sleep apnea
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Allergic reactions
- Drowsiness, dizziness, and/or confusion
- Impaired judgment and inability to operate machines or drive motor vehicles
- Nausea, vomiting, and/or constipation.
- Urinary retention/constipation (inability to go to the bathroom)
- Development of tolerance (the medication becomes less effective)
- Increased pain (opioid induced hyperalgesia OIH)
- Decreased immunity (more prone to infection)
- Hormonal imbalance
- Sexual dysfunction including decreased libido
- Anxiety or depression
- Death
- Neonatal abstinence syndrome

A good rule of thumb is not to put the medication any place you would not leave \$1000 in cash. A small, inexpensive safe or lockable cabinet is a good idea.

Do this to wean off short acting pain medicine:

Step 1: When you start weaning off the medicine, increase the amount of time between doses. For example, if you are taking a dose every 4 hours, extend that time:

- Take a dose every 5 to 6 hours for 1 or 2 days.
- Then, take a dose every 7 to 8 hours for 1 or 2 days.

After step 1, start to reduce the dose. For example:

- If you are taking 2 pills each time, start taking 1 pill each time. Do this for 1 to 2 days.
- If you are taking 1 pill each time, cut the pill in half and take only half a pill each time. Do this for 1 to 2 days.

If you think that you have a drug addiction problem, or your family is concerned about your use/misuse of medications, please call your surgeon, and 1-800-662-4357 for drug treatment options in your area.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has a National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357), for those with a possible opioid use disorder. The Helpline is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in

English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations.

How do I dispose of opioids?

DO NOT THROW UNUSED MEDICATION IN THE TRASH. You should return these medications through a take-back program or to a collection box or mail-back program authorized by the Drug Enforcement Administration. Authorized collection sites include retail pharmacies, hospital or clinic pharmacies, and law enforcement locations.

This website provides a list of locations where you can safely dispose of opioids:

<https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch>

If a take-back program is not available, flush unused medicines down the toilet or sink.

Because diverted / stolen opioids are causing an epidemic of deaths in the US, lost or stolen medications will not be replaced. It is your responsibility to safeguard them.