

How to Take Opioid Pain Medicine After Surgery

You have been prescribed an opioid medicine.

The goals are to do these 3 things:

- Ease your pain.
- Keep you moving.
- Help you heal.

Opioids can ease pain but do not take the pain away completely.

My opioid pain medicine is:

_____ (Medicine Name)

How can I ease my pain?

There are many ways you can help ease your pain. Try to use other ways such as using heat or cold, deep breathing, and distracting yourself with activities.

If needed, use other medicines to reduce your pain first before using opioids.

Other medicines you can use:

- plain acetaminophen (Tylenol® or generic) 650 to 1000 mg four times a day
- ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin®, or generic) 400 mg four times a day
- Other: _____

These medicines are your **first choice** before you take opioids. Take them through the day and night such as every 6 hours.

Use these medicines to manage pain that bothers you but that does not get in the way of everyday life (sleeping, eating, talking). You do not always need to take opioids.

How do I take opioids safely?

Take your opioid medicine when you have a lot of pain and you have already tried using other medicines or other ways to ease the pain. For example, when pain gets in the way of your everyday activities like sitting up, walking, eating, talking, or sleeping.

Take your medicine as you were told by your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

If you miss a dose, there is no need to make up for it. Do not take 2 doses at once.

While taking opioid pain medicine:

- **Do not** drive.
- **Do not** drink alcohol.
- **Do not** take with medicines that can make you drowsy such as sleep aids, anti-anxiety medicines, muscle relaxers, or another opioid.

Note: Opioid pain medicines can dull your thinking and make you sleepy. Alcohol and some other medicines can increase these effects.

What should I expect?

How much pain you have and how much pain medicine you need depends on the type of surgery you had.

We decide how much opioid pain medicine you get based on what we know most people need for a similar surgery.

As you recover, you should have less pain and need to take less opioid medicine.

You do not need to suffer with pain. Contact your healthcare team for help if you have pain that gets in the way of everyday life or gets worse than expected. Sometimes it takes a few changes to medicine to find the right type and amount that works for you.

Are there any side effects to opioids?

Yes. Common side effects include:

- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea)
- hard and dry poop that is difficult to pass (constipation)
- feeling dizzy, tired, or sleepy
- feeling itchy

Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about what to do to lessen these side effects.

Other safety tips

- Fill all your prescriptions at the same pharmacy.
- Keep opioid medicines in a safe place, out of sight and reach of children and pets.
- Keep opioid medicine in its original bottle so you do not take it by mistake.
- Let your healthcare team know if you take any mind-altering substances including sleeping pills, alcohol, cannabis, and recreational or illegal drugs.
- If you get an allergic reaction such as a rash or itching, contact your doctor or nurse.
- If you feel sleepy and/or dizzy, do not drive or work with machinery.
- Never share your opioid medicine with others. Do not borrow any from a relative or friend.
- Return any leftover medicine to any pharmacy so it can be safely disposed.

What should I watch for?

Opioids can be dangerous if you take too much. You are someone around you should contact your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist right away if:

- You are sleepier than normal, **or**
- You are breathing slower than normal (less than 12 breaths in a minute).

Someone around you needs to **call 9-1-1** if either of these things happen:

- They cannot wake you up (unconscious).
- You are not breathing.

These are signs of an opioid overdose.

Addiction can happen to anyone using opioids. To lessen the chances of becoming addicted, take the lowest possible dose for the shortest possible time. If you are worried about becoming addicted or want to know more about addiction, talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.