



What are prescription opioids?

Prescription opioids are prescribed by a doctor for pain relief (you need a script to buy them). They include drugs such as such as oxycodone (e.g. Endone, OxyContin), morphine (e.g. Kapanol, MS Contin), and higher doses of codeine (e.g. in Panadeine Forte).

What do they look like?

Prescription opioids come in many shapes and sizes, depending on the product and the brand:

- ⊙ tablets
- ⊙ capsules
- ⊙ suppositories
- ⊙ soluble powders
- ⊙ liquids.

What are the short term effects?

- ⊙ reduced pain
- ⊙ sleepiness (sedation) and relaxation, calm
- ⊙ dizziness/confusion
- ⊙ constipation
- ⊙ dry mouth.

What are the long term effects?

Prescription opioids are addictive. The effects of reduced pain, relaxation, and slowed breathing decrease and the drug becomes less effective with long-term use. Regular use of prescription opioids may eventually cause:

- ⊙ constipation
- ⊙ reduced sex drive
- ⊙ sleep problems
- ⊙ tension and muscle twitches
- ⊙ needing to use more to get the same effect
- ⊙ dental problems - caused by dry mouth
- ⊙ financial, work and social problems.

It is best to discuss the side effects of long term use with a doctor.

Signs of overdose

If a person takes more than the amount prescribed, they may experience:

- ⊙ chest pain
- ⊙ slow, shallow breathing
- ⊙ blue lips and fingertips
- ⊙ passing out
- ⊙ coma.

Overdose can result in death.

What to do about overdose

- ⊙ Call an ambulance (000).
- ⊙ Call for help from people nearby.
- ⊙ If the person looks like they are about to vomit, lie them on their side and try to make sure they do not inhale the vomit.
- ⊙ Do not let the person fall asleep – keep them moving and awake if possible.
- ⊙ Do not give drinks or other drugs to ‘wake them up’ like coffee, water, or stimulants.
- ⊙ Start CPR if they stop breathing.

Dependence

People may become dependent on prescription opioids after taking them for a long time for pain relief, particularly with chronic pain. Some people use prescription opioids as a drug because heroin is not available, or if they cannot get on methadone or buprenorphine maintenance treatment.

Withdrawal

Giving up prescription opioids after using for a long time can be difficult because the body has to get used to functioning without the drug. If a person is planning on giving up prescription opioids, it is important they seek advice from a health professional first.

Withdrawal symptoms can include:

- ⊙ runny nose
- ⊙ difficulty sleeping
- ⊙ trembling, aching, muscles and joints
- ⊙ fever, chills.



If you want help and support or are worried about someone's use of prescription opioids call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) in your state. See also the Knowledge Centre listing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs.

For telephone advice in cases of acute and chronic poisoning for prescription and non prescription drugs, call the Poisons Information Centre, Ph: 131 126 (24 hours, Australia wide service).

References

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