

Using Opioid Pain Medicine: Your Safety Guide

Pharmacology · High-Alert Medications

Opioids, such as oxycodone and hydrocodone, are strong pain medicines. They ease severe pain, but they also slow your breathing, so use them with great care.

Take it only as prescribed

- Take the lowest dose that helps, for the shortest time.
- Never take extra doses or take them closer together.
- If your pill has acetaminophen (Tylenol), ask before you take more Tylenol.

Never mix with

- **Alcohol, sleeping pills, or anxiety pills.** Together they slow your breathing to a dangerous level.
- Ask before allergy or sleep aids such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl).

Stay safe every day

- Do not drive until you know how the medicine affects you.
- Stand up slowly.
- Prevent constipation: drink fluids, eat fiber, walk, and take your stool softener or laxative as told.

Keep naloxone at home

- Naloxone (Narcan) nasal spray reverses an overdose. Show your family how to use it.
- Spray it into one nostril, then call 911.

- No response in 2 to 3 minutes: give a second dose in the other nostril.
- Stay with the person until help arrives.

Store and throw away pills safely

- Lock them up. Count them. Never share them.
- Take leftover pills to a drug take-back site or pharmacy drop box.

Call your provider today if you have

- Much more sleepiness than usual, but you wake up easily: skip the next dose and call
- No bowel movement for 3 days
- Pain that the medicine does not control
- Nausea or itching that will not go away

Call 911 or your local emergency number if you have

- Extreme sleepiness, or the person cannot be woken
- Slow, shallow, or no breathing
- Tiny (pinpoint) pupils, or blue or gray lips
- **Give naloxone and call 911.**

This handout supports, not replaces, advice from your own nurse or doctor.

Online: ncllexpace.com/patient-education/opioid-pain-medicine-safety/patient

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