

# Think you need an opioid? Here are questions to ask your doctor

May 15 2023, by Cara Murez

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It's important to ask questions when your doctor or dentist writes you a

new prescription.

This is especially true for [opioid pain medications](#), such as hydrocodone, oxycodone or morphine.

While these drugs are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for acute and [chronic pain](#), they can have [serious side effects](#), including addiction and even death.

Misuse of opioids have led to the current [drug](#) overdose crisis in the United States. The majority of overdose deaths in this country involve opioids, according to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

The FDA offers some tips for using these medications safely. Start by asking your doctor how long your pain is likely to last and what medication is being prescribed.

If the drug is an [opioid](#), ask if there are non-opioid alternatives.

If your doctor decides an opioid is best, ask how long you should take the medication. Find out when and how to stop using it. Ask for the lowest dose possible for the shortest time needed and in the smallest quantity, the FDA advised. Also ask about a follow-up appointment.

While prescription opioids can be safe and effective, using them in a way that differs from what was prescribed or for non-medical reasons can lead to dependence, addiction and even death, the FDA cautioned.

Side effects from [opioid use](#) include dizziness, drowsiness, weakness, nausea and constipation. Familiarize yourself with the [side effects](#) so that you and your family know when to call a doctor, go to the hospital or call 911.

Ask your pharmacist for a Medication Guide handout to learn more about your prescription.

Reduce the chances for serious side effects by taking the drug exactly as prescribed. If you still feel pain, call a doctor—don't take an extra dose.

It's important to tell your doctor if you have a history of a substance use disorder involving drugs or alcohol or if any of your friends and family have had this type of disorder.

Always tell your doctor about all of your other prescription and over-the-counter medicines, especially those prescribed to treat anxiety, sleeping problems or seizure. These could interact with opioids, even if you take them only occasionally.

If you have kids of any age at home, use a lockbox for your medications. Children can accidentally overdose on these drugs. It's possible that teens, visitors and others in your home may look for pain medications, so it's important to be aware of that, the FDA noted.

Leftover medication should be properly discarded. The FDA has a list of opioid pain medicines that can be flushed down the toilet, but others are better left at a drug take-back program. Some pharmacies have on-site medicine drop-off boxes, mail-back programs and other methods for safe disposal.

Never share your medication; it may kill someone else, the FDA warned.

Talk with your [health care provider](#) about naloxone, a drug that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. It can make sense to be prepared.

Some naloxone products require a prescription. In some states,

consumers may be able to get naloxone from a pharmacist without a prescription.

**More information:** The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has [a list](#) of drugs that can be safely flushed down the toilet.

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