



Opioid addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disease, like heart disease or diabetes. A chronic disease is a medical condition for life.

For more information, please visit:

What are opioids:

drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids

Effective Treatments for Opioid Addiction:

drugabuse.gov/publications/effective-treatments-opioid-addiction/effective-treatments-opioid-addiction

Treatment guides (adults and youth):

drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment

Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator:

findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Additional publications:

drugabuse.gov/publications/finder/t/142/opioids

Preventing misuse of prescription drugs:

drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/how-can-prescription-drug-misuse-be-prevented

FDA guidance (prescription take back):

<https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/SafeDisposalofMedicines/ucm186187.htm>

TAKE-HOME FACTS:

Addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disease that needs to be managed over time.

Addiction is NOT a sign of weakness. It is NOT TRUE that all anybody needs to kick addiction is to “be strong.”

Successful treatments are available, such as medication, counseling, and support from family and friends. Traditional healing and spirituality offer transformative change for some people.

The goal of medication-assisted treatment is to recover from addiction. It does NOT replace one addictive drug with another. It provides a safe, controlled level of medication to overcome the use of a problem opioid and help people live full lives.

Recovery is possible: it takes ongoing work and support. Recovery takes commitment every day by the individual, family, and community, through treatment and beyond.



Opioid Addiction

A Chronic Disease



WHAT IS DRUG ADDICTION?

Addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences. It is considered a brain disease because drugs change the brain—they change its structure and how it works. These brain changes can be long lasting and can lead to the harmful behaviors seen in people who misuse drugs. Drug addiction is not a weakness.

WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are naturally found in the opium poppy plant. Some opioid medications are made from this plant, while others are made in laboratories. Opioids have been used for hundreds of years to treat pain, cough, and diarrhea. Opioids include the illegal drug heroin, human-made opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers like Vicodin®, Percocet®, and OxyContin®.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF OPIOIDS?

In the short term, opioids can make some people feel relaxed and happy. But they can also cause more harmful effects, like extreme sleepiness, confusion, nausea, vomiting, and constipation. Over time, opioids can lead to insomnia, muscle pain, heart infections, pneumonia, and addiction. Opioids can also lead to overdose and death. If you suspect an overdose, naloxone is a medicine that can treat an opioid overdose when given right away. It is available in many different dosage forms and can be given by both medical and nonmedical persons.

Opioid use during pregnancy—even if taken as a doctor instructed—can lead to miscarriage or low birth weight. It can also cause neonatal abstinence syndrome, a medical condition where the baby is born dependent on opioids and has withdrawal symptoms after being born. If a pregnant woman tries to stop taking opioids suddenly without medical help, she can put the baby at risk. It is important for the mother to tell her doctor about all drugs she is taking or planning to take so that the baby has a greater chance of being born healthy.

CAN OPIOID ADDICTION BE TREATED?

Quitting opioids can be hard, but it is possible. There are medicines approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat opioid addiction. A combination of behavioral therapy and medication has proven to be very effective in treating opioid addiction. Treatment helps people:

- stop using the problem drug and cope with cravings
- reduce feeling “sick” from withdrawal symptoms
- move away from other harmful behaviors, such as drinking alcohol or abusing other drugs
- address life issues that are tied to the addiction, such as feelings of low self-worth, a bad situation at work or home, or time spent with people who use drugs

Treatment that includes medication (referred to as medication-assisted treatment or MAT), along with counseling and support, is often the best choice for opioid addiction. The medications used in treatment of opioid addiction are methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone. They help people with withdrawal

symptoms, reduce cravings, and can prevent relapse (falling back into problem drug use). All of these medications have the same positive effect: they reduce problem addiction behavior and help people live better lives. These medications are not replacing one drug for another.

When a person decides to try medication-assisted treatment, the first step is to meet with a health care provider for an initial assessment to learn which medication is best for him or her and to prepare a treatment plan. Many people also benefit from counseling and support groups that can provide encouragement and motivation, including traditional healing and spiritual approaches. Finally, the ongoing support of family, friends, and the community can help with the decision to begin treatment and stick with it, as going through recovery alone is very hard and takes time.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG TAKE BACK PROGRAM

Prescription drugs should be used and stored as explained by the pharmacist. Not following the directions may result in their misuse, not just by yourself, but also by family members. Old prescriptions left in medicine cabinets or elsewhere in the home can often be an easy source for those who would like to misuse prescription medications. Any nonused or expired medicines should be discarded appropriately. One way to discard medication is participating in your local Prescription Drug Take Back Program. You can ask your provider or tribal leaders about this program in your community.