



Patient & Family Guide
2020

Using Opioids for Chronic Pain



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Medication name:

Dosage: _____

Using Opioids for Chronic Pain

This pamphlet will tell you how to safely take opioids for chronic pain.

What are opioid medications and how can they help me?

Opioid medications are analgesics (painkillers), commonly known as **narcotics**. They are used to manage severe pain. They may be short-acting (immediate release) or long-acting (controlled release).

- Long-acting medications can give consistent (the same) pain relief over a long period of time.
- Short-acting medications can be used for breakthrough pain or a flare-up of pain.

Opioid medications can be safe and work well if prescribed and monitored by your health care provider. You must be checked regularly to get the best benefit from this medication.

A health care provider must follow strict guidelines when prescribing an opioid medication. A special monitoring program in Nova Scotia monitors all health care providers who prescribe opioids, and all patients who use them. You must see your health care provider each time you need a prescription. One health care provider and one drugstore should be used to get your opioid medication.

When do I take opioids?

- Your medication may be taken with or without food.
- Take the medication as prescribed for best results.
- **It is very important to follow your health care provider's directions.**



What if I miss a dose?

If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose.

Do not take a double dose.

Special precautions

- Tolerance and physical dependence tend to happen with repeated use of this type of medication. Read more in the ‘Common concerns’ section of this pamphlet on page 6.
- Talk to your health care provider before taking this medication if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Talk to your health care provider before taking this medication if you have:
 - › respiratory disease
 - › heart disease
 - › asthma
 - › seizures
- Seniors and people with kidney problems may need smaller doses.
- Your health care provider will want to check on your progress. Make sure you go to all of your appointments.
- **Do not stop taking this medication unless your health care provider tells you to do so.**
- Take more or less of this medication exactly as your health care provider tells you to. This will help you get the best pain relief and the fewest side effects.

- **Do not stop taking this medication all of a sudden as you may have withdrawal symptoms.** If your health care provider asks you to take less or more, or stop taking opioids, your dose will be changed **slowly over time.**
- Tell your dentist and any new health care providers or pharmacists that you are taking opioids.
- Opioids may make you light-headed or drowsy. Make sure you know how your body reacts to this medication before you drive, use machines, or do other jobs where you need to be alert and able to see well.
- Check with your health care provider before you take any other medications.
- **Do not drink alcohol while taking opioids.**



This pamphlet is just a guide. If you have questions, please talk to your health care provider. We are here to help you.

Common side effects

- › trouble going to the bathroom
- › dizziness
- › drowsiness and/or tiredness
- › not able to sleep
- › nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
- › vomiting
- › heart pounding
- › weakness
- › dry mouth
- › sweating
- › headaches
- › mood swings
- › restlessness

Many side effects will go away within 2 weeks of starting the medication. If they are severe (very bad) or hard to manage, contact your health care provider or the Pain Management Clinic.

Call your health care provider right away if you have:

- › extreme drowsiness and/or slowed breathing
- › confusion and/or hallucinations
- › itching
- › rash

Common concerns

- The use of an opioid medication can lead to tolerance, dependence, and/or addiction. **Tolerance and dependence** are often confused with **addiction**. The explanations below may help you to understand the differences. Your health care provider and clinic nurse will answer any questions you may have.
- **Tolerance** to an opioid medication can happen as your body gets used to the medication. You may have less side effects or develop a **tolerance** to the opioid medication. Over time the opioid medication may not work as well. Your health care provider may have to change the amount of medication you take. Tolerance does not happen to everyone.
- **Dependence does not mean addiction.** Physical **dependence** happens when opioid medications are used over a period of time. This means that your body has adjusted to having the opioid medication. You may have flu-like symptoms if the medication is suddenly stopped. These symptoms can be severe. To avoid this, your health care provider may lower the dose slowly over time, and treat any symptoms that happen.
- Your health care provider will decide if you should stop the opioid or lower the amount that you are taking.

- Many people are worried about trying opioid medication because they are afraid of **addiction**. Your health care provider and clinic nurse will talk about this with you and answer any questions.
- Some people are at a high risk for **addiction**, such as:
 - › people who have misused other medications, alcohol, or street drugs
 - › people who have had a problem with **addiction** in the past
 - › people who have an uncontrollable urge to use a substance for the ‘high’ and not for the relief of pain, even though continued use will cause harm physically, financially, or to their social or emotional well-being

Talk about these concerns with your health care provider to avoid any problems.

**What are your questions?
Please ask. We are here to help you.**

How do I store my opioids?

- We strongly recommend storing your opioids in a locked box.
- Store tablets at room temperature (15-30°C).
- Keep opioids and all other medications out of the reach of children and pets.
- Do not store medications in a damp place such as the bathroom.
- Store suppositories and liquid forms in the fridge in a **locked box** so that they don't mix with other items such as food and/or drinks.



Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

Nova Scotia Health Authority promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.

Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

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Prepared by: Pain Management Unit

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The information in this brochure is for informational and educational purposes only.

The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.