

## Overdose

Including the risk of overdosing, opioid addiction can cause life-threatening health problems and severe issues overall. Overdose occurs when high doses of opioids cause a slower breathing rhythm, or breathing is halted all together, leading to unconsciousness and death if the overdose is not treated immediately. Opioids carry a risk of overdose for both legal and illegal forms of this drug, especially if a person takes too much of the drug, or if opioids are combined with different drugs (particularly tranquilizers called benzodiazepines).

## Know Your Triggers

Relapse can be common for recovering drug addicts due to how the brain has been permanently altered. If you can understand what leads to relapse, you can take the necessary steps to avoid the thing that makes you want to use drugs. Different people will be triggered by different things, but there are some common emotions that can lead to a relapse, and you end up running back for more. Fear, frustration, depression, stress or anxiety can lead to a relapse, but being aware of these emotional trigger points and learning different ways to cope with them can keep you from using drugs to try and escape your problems.

Whatever you do, know that relapse doesn't mean failure; it's a learning opportunity for growth. You may feel like you failed, but you need to forgive yourself. Relapse may be part of your recovering journey, but it's not a reason to give up on your sobriety.



## Here are a few tips for staying sober:

**Live in the now.** You can't alter what happened in the past or control what will eventually happen in the future. Just try your best right now.

**Don't test your willpower.** Get rid of the temptation and stay away from environments that will test and entice you.

**Embrace change.** Although at times it may be scary, change is not always a bad thing. Change can be good, especially when you're becoming a better person because of it.

**Let go of resentment.** This includes resentment of yourself and of anyone else. Learn to find forgiveness.

**Don't live in fear of relapsing.** Worrying and getting anxious about slipping into bad habits is just as dangerous for your sobriety as actually relapsing. Focus on your strength and look at how far you've come.



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# OPIOIDS



*Fighting the Urge*



## What are Opioids?

The term “opioids” covers a massive variety of drugs, all ranging from legal drugs like morphine to illegal drugs like heroin. Their main function is acting on the central nervous system to relieve pain. Legal opioids like oxycodone, codeine or morphine are safe when prescribed by a doctor for a short time and in small doses. When abused—taken without a prescription, in larger quantities or in the incorrect way—opioids can lead to some feelings of euphoria on top of pain relief, but they can also lead to addiction, overdose or death.

Commonly prescribed opioids include oxycontin, codeine, demerol, percocet, fentanyl, vicodin, methadone and morphine. There are some other forms of opioids, such as heroin, that remain illegal drugs of abuse.

## Tolerance to Addiction

Over time, a user's dose needs to be increased if they want to achieve the same effect; opioids change the chemistry of the brain and lead to drug tolerance. When you take opioids repeatedly over time, your body slows its production of endorphins, therefore, the typical dose of opioids eventually stops triggering such a strong flood of good feelings. This is called tolerance.

One reason opioid addiction is so common is that people who develop tolerance may feel driven to increase their doses so they can keep feeling good. Taking opioids over a long period of time produces dependence, so when people forfeit their habit of taking the drug, they have physical and psychological symptoms of withdrawal (such as muscle cramping, diarrhea and anxiety). Dependence is not the same thing as addiction; although everyone who takes opioids for an extended period of time will become dependent, but some also experience the compulsive, continuing need for the drug that characterizes addiction.



## Opioid Addiction

### The Urge for Pills

Opioid addiction is a long-lasting (chronic) disease that can increase major health risks, social dilemmas and economic problems. Acting mostly in the nervous system, opioids are drugs that create a euphoria of happiness, and overall relieving pain while replacing that with pleasure. However, there are common instances where opioids are legally prescribed by healthcare providers to manage severe and chronic pain.

The forefront of opioid addiction is characterized by the compulsive urge to use opioid drugs, even when they are no longer medically required or needed. Even when the medications are appropriate and taken as instructed, opioids have a high potential for causing addiction in some people. Many times, prescription opioids are misused or distributed to others. Individuals who become addicted may prioritize these drugs over other activities in their lives. Relying upon a drug for a temporary sense of happiness, there are many addicts who begin prioritizing the use of these drugs over professional and personal matters and relationships.

## Who's at Risk for Drug Addiction?

Anyone can become addicted to something, but there are a lot of different factors to consider that may cause an individual to develop an addiction:

- **Age.** Adolescents' brains are not as developed as an adult's, thereby making them more vulnerable to addiction. Not only are teenagers more likely to begin using drugs than adults, they're less resistant to treatment and more likely to relapse.
- **Genetics.** Research shows that genetic factors, along with social and other psychological factors, are associated with addiction. Roughly half of a person's risk is attributed to their genetic makeup.
- **Psychological.** People with mental health disorders like depression, anxiety, ADHD, or PTSD are more likely to develop substance abuse disorders because they attempt to use drugs to deal with their problems.
- **Environmental.** People with adverse childhood experiences—like abuse or household dysfunction—are more likely to not only suffer with substance abuse but also other problems throughout their lifespan.

## Statistics Don't Lie

### It's All in the Numbers!

Studies show that more than 4 million Americans take opioid prescription pain relievers for non-medical uses. There are many instances in which people report misusing prescription opioids before starting to use other drugs like heroin. Every single year, there are more than 28,000 Americans that die from opioid overdoses.

Prescription opioids are significant in helping millions of people effectively manage chronic pain. For some reason, opioids have become a sort of complex, repetitive cycle of abuse, that has led to human and economic devastation regarding addiction. Nonetheless, there are many different angles that tie into the epidemic that is opioid addiction.

