



## PREVENTING ADDICTION AND QUITTING OPIOIDS

The easiest way to treat an addiction is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. Being aware of the deadly consequences to using opioids (either for pain or recreationally) can inform your decision not to begin using. Doctors are more aware of the risk for opioids now and will likely only prescribe for short term periods and not increase doses. Speak with your doctor if you believe you are at risk for an addiction. In addition, getting opioids from non-medical sources have a grave danger of being laced with other life-threatening drugs.

When quitting an opioid addiction, it is important to receive qualified medical advice. Your doctor may even be able to prescribe medication to make the process of quitting and withdrawal symptoms more manageable. Quitting may be difficult and require several tries, but you owe it to yourself and loved ones to try.

In addition, if you or a loved one is concerned about overdose, it is important to seek emergency medical assistance. The first responders will be able to administer opioid overdose reversal medication, such as Naloxone. Further, if you are at risk of an opioid overdose, you may be able to purchase Naloxone with or without a prescription at a pharmacy.

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

How do opioids affect your body? Let's test your knowledge.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has almost doubled opioid overdose fatalities.
  - True
  - False
- If a medical professional prescribes you an opioid, you cannot become addicted to it.
  - True
  - False
- Opioid use can make side effects of COVID-19 more dangerous.
  - True
  - False
- Both heroin and oxycodone are opioids.
  - True
  - False
- Opioids do not affect brain chemicals, such as endorphins.
  - True
  - False
- Some pharmacies now allow the purchase of Naloxone (the opioid overdose reversal medication) without a prescription.
  - True
  - False

Answers: 1.a 2.b 3.a 4.a 5.b 6.a

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# COVID-19 AND OPIOIDS

## WORSENING THE EPIDEMIC





## THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Before there was the COVID-19 pandemic, there was the opioid epidemic. Opioids are drugs that can be prescribed by doctors (e.g., oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine) or purchased illegally (e.g., heroin, fentanyl). The Opioid epidemic is rapidly spreading across the United States, destroying lives and families.

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a similar path globally, worsening already existing health concerns. The major difference between a pandemic and an epidemic is its geographic range.

Due to the dangerous natures of both the opioid epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to mitigate the risk of addiction and focus on recovery, if currently facing addiction. Tragically, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased opioid use, resulting in greater overdoses and fatalities.

Environmental factors that traditionally lead to drug use and addiction have been heightened by the pandemic. Factors such as stress, anxiety, isolation, loneliness, and financial worry contribute to opioid use when individuals use the substance to cope. While perhaps a temporary respite, the effects of opioid addiction are long-lasting and sometimes fatal.

Opioids, even when prescribed by a medical professional, have been proven to be highly addictive. Opioid use can quickly lead to dependence. Opioid use can lead to impaired judgment and overdose. In 2019 alone, the opioid-use fatality rates were as high as 49,860 deaths.

This epidemic is not going away with focused attention on the COVID-19 pandemic. And in fact, the COVID-19 pandemic is actually worsening the Opioid epidemic. The number of fatalities has nearly doubled at 81,000 deaths within a year.



## DANGERS OF OPIOID USE TO YOUR RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

Opioids slow down breathing which adds extra concern during the COVID-19 pandemic. When a person becomes infected with the COVID-19 virus, the virus targets the respiratory system and can make it difficult to breathe.

Difficulty breathing can lead to lack of oxygen, which is essential to brain functioning. This can lead to higher mortality rates. What's more – COVID-19 can lead to long-lasting respiratory conditions and chronic breathing issues. Chronic respiratory conditions can increase the risk for overdose mortality.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique challenge for those struggling with opioid addiction. It is critical to use caution and seek medical advice when being prescribed opioids or when dealing with an addiction.



## THE SCIENCE BEHIND OPIOID ADDICTION

Opioids affect everyone differently. Whether you're prescribed your first dose of opioids or you discover it through another avenue, opioids are an addictive substance. Previous personal history, genetics, and the amount of time you've been taking opioids affects your susceptibility to addiction. Ultimately, however, there is no way to predict who will be susceptible.

Opioids trigger a very strong response in your brain that can feel impossible to live without. Specifically, the drug plays on your endorphin response. Endorphins are naturally released when we exercise, laugh, spend time with loved ones, and eat certain healthy foods to name a few tasks.

Opioids release a powerful wave of endorphins for a temporary time. After the drug wears off, you may find yourself having an irresistible craving to the drug. Over time, using opioids becomes more addictive. This is why some people find themselves addicted to opioids from treating chronic pain.

