

# Fact Check: OPIOIDS

## WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are a group of drugs that block pain signals between the body and the brain. Examples include oxycodone, codeine, morphine, fentanyl, opium, methadone, and heroin.

## ARE THEY SAFE?

When prescribed by a healthcare provider and taken according to directions, opioids are safe and effective. However, there can be unexpected or unwanted side effects. It is important to tell your provider about any unwanted side effects, or if the medicine is not working as expected.

**Misusing opioids is dangerous, and can lead to illness and death.** Opioid misuse can also lead to drug dependence and addiction. *Dependence* means someone experiences withdrawal symptoms if they stop taking the drug. *Addiction* means someone needs more and more of the drug to achieve the same effects. This could lead to an accidental overdose.



Narcan (naloxone) is a drug that can temporarily reverse the effects of opioid overdose. If you have Narcan and are trained to use it, it can save a life. ALWAYS call 9-1-1 anyway, even if the overdosed person wakes up. Narcan's effects could wear off before the effects of the opioid.

## EXAMPLES OF OPIOID MISUSE:

- Taking someone else's prescription medicine, even if you have similar symptoms.
- Taking more than the prescribed dose.
- Taking an opioid in a way other than prescribed—for example, crushing pills into powder to snort or inject.
- Taking opioids just to relax or to get "high."
- Mixing opioids with alcohol or other drugs without your doctor's permission.

If you or someone you know needs help with drug dependence, addiction, or misuse, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services National HOTLINE: **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**. Free & confidential.

## WHAT DOES OVERDOSE LOOK LIKE?

Opioids cause sedation and slow down breathing. At high doses, a person's breathing could become too slow—or stop altogether—leading to brain damage and death.

If you see even one of these **overdose signs**, call 9-1-1 immediately. Never leave an overdosed person to "sleep it off."

- Pinpoint pupils
- Shallow or stopped breathing.
- Person won't wake up, even if you shake or yell at them.
- Blue lips, skin, or fingernails. If a person has darker skin, these may be grey.



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