

What are the risks?

Using opioids has a number of different risks.

Psychological:

- Cravings
- Dependency and addiction
- Anxiety with continued use
- Paranoia
- Mood instability
- Lack of motivation
- Self esteem
- Low or little energy

Physical:

- Overdose
- Constipation
- Nausea
- Itching (excoriated skin from scratching)
- Cold sweats
- Lethargy
- Dizziness and fainting
- Respiratory difficulties
- Liver and kidney problems with long term use
- Physical dependency and withdrawals
- Sleep disturbance

Did you know?

In pregnancy, having taken high doses of opioids for a continuous time can lead to withdrawal symptoms for the newborn baby.

Opioids and the law

Strong opioid painkillers are only available on prescription and most are controlled under of the Misuse of Drugs Act and are classified as class A or B drugs. So unless an opiate painkiller has been prescribed to you it's illegal to have.

Depending on the circumstances, possession of a class A opioid painkiller which has not been prescribed for you, could get you community service or up to 7 years in prison and/or an unlimited fine. The unauthorised possession of a class B opioid painkiller (not prescribed) could get you community service or up to 5 years in prison and/or an unlimited fine.

Find out more

If you would like more information or support on opioids or you are affected by someone else's use please contact us at Inclusion Recovery Hampshire.

Information is also available at:

NHS Website: www.nhs.uk

Talk to Frank Website: www.talktofrank.com

HOW TO CONTACT US

NORTH: 01782 639856
StarsNorth@mpft.nhs.uk

EAST: 01283 741053
StarsEast@mpft.nhs.uk

WEST: 01785 270080
StarsWest@mpft.nhs.uk

Or visit: www.staffstars.org

You. Me. Us

This leaflet was created by:   Part of Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust Find out more at www.inclusion.org

Opioids

What you need to know!



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What are opioids?

- Opioids are drugs that act on the nervous system to relieve pain. Continued use and abuse can lead to physical dependence and withdrawal symptoms.
- Many of them are prescription medications used for pain relief, but heroin is also an opioid.
- Opioid drugs bind to opioid receptors on cells in the brain and throughout the body.
- Opioid pain relievers are generally safe when taken for a short time and as prescribed by a doctor, but because they produce euphoria in addition to pain relief, they can be misused (taken in a different way or in a larger quantity than prescribed, or taken without a doctor's prescription).
- Regular use – even as prescribed by a doctor – can lead to dependence and, when misused, opioid pain relievers can lead to overdose and deaths.
- There are a large number of opiate/opioid medicines including codeine, morphine, dihydrocodeine, methadone, buprenorphine and diamorphine (also known as heroin).
- Opioid painkillers are available either from doctors on prescription; or, in relatively low doses over-the-counter.

The myths

- Opioids are safe to use
- You cannot become addicted to opioids

The truth is although they are normally safe to take if you follow your doctor's/pharmacists instructions, some people who use opioid painkillers regularly become dependent on them.

If they are taken primarily to get high and to feel better, the risk of addiction will be greater.

How are opioids taken?

Opioid painkillers can be swallowed, injected, snorted, sucked or absorbed through the skin or bowel.

They are used mainly to treat moderate to severe pain. This can range from relieving acute back pain, to use for broken bones, and for people who are being treated for cancer.

What do they look like?

Opioid painkillers are available in many forms and various colours. The most common are tablets, capsules and syrups/linctus, and as solutions for injection. Less common forms include lozenges, nasal sprays, suppositories and skin patches.

Most opioid painkillers are only available on prescription from a doctor or other prescriber.

Some opiates at low doses, such as co-codamol, are designed to be able to be bought over-the-counter in pharmacies. These are used for treating severe headaches, period pains etc., which have not responded to simpler non-opioid treatments.



What are the effects?

Different opioid painkillers vary in how powerful they are, we aren't going to list all of their medical uses but they are often aimed to have the following effects:

- Relief of pain
- Reduced coughing
- Sedation
- Dizziness or fainting
- Palpitations
- Shallow Breathing
- Bigger doses can make people sleepy and very relaxed

The effects can last for a number of hours so it is important to be careful using any other drugs or alcohol in that time.

Over time the effects on the brain cause cravings and a strong drive to keep on using.

