

## **Facts About Opioid Overdose**



### **How Does an Overdose Occur?**

**O**pioid overdose can occur when a patient misunderstands the directions for use, accidentally takes an extra dose, or deliberately misuses a prescription opioid or an illicit drug such as heroin. Also at risk is the person who takes opioid medications prescribed for someone else, as is the individual who combines opioids – prescribed or illicit – with alcohol, certain other medications, and even some over-the-counter products that depress breathing, heart rate, and other functions of the central nervous system.

### **How to Avoid Opioid Overdose**

- 1.** Take medicine only if it has been prescribed to you by your doctor.
- 2.** Do not take more medicine or take it more often than instructed.
- 3.** Call a doctor if your pain gets worse.
- 4.** Never mix pain medicines with alcohol, sleeping pills, or any illicit substance.
- 5.** Store your medicine in a safe place where children or pets cannot reach it.
- 6.** Learn the signs of overdose and how to use naloxone to keep it from becoming fatal.
- 7.** Teach your family and friends how to respond to an overdose.
- 8.** Dispose of unused medication properly.

### **What Is Naloxone?**

Naloxone (Narcan) is an antidote to opioid overdose. It is an opioid antagonist that is used to reverse the effects of opioids. Naloxone works by blocking opiate receptor sites. It is not effective in treating overdoses of benzodiazepines (such as Valium, Xanax, or Klonopin), barbiturates (Seconal or Fiorinal), clonidine, Elavil, GHB, or ketamine. It also is not effective in treating overdoses of stimulants such as cocaine and amphetamines (including methamphetamine and Ecstasy). However, if opioids are taken in combination with other sedatives or stimulants, naloxone may be helpful.



**Opioid Overdose Toolkit** (continued)

**Where Can I Get Naloxone?**

In 2014, Pennsylvania made it legal for family and friends of opiate users to obtain naloxone prescriptions. Any physician can prescribe naloxone. Some counties (such as Allegheny County) have issued a standing order for naloxone which allows anyone to obtain it directly from a pharmacy without a prescription. Make sure to check with your pharmacist to see if she dispenses naloxone. Currently, most Pennsylvania pharmacies do not dispense naloxone, but the list of pharmacies who do is growing.

For more information, see the Pennsylvania Department of Health website.



## Seeking Drug Abuse Treatment: Know What to Ask

**T**rying to identify the right treatment programs for a loved one can be a difficult process. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) recommends asking the following questions when searching for a treatment program:

**Q: Does the program use treatments backed by scientific evidence?**

**A:** Effective drug abuse treatments can include behavioral therapy, medications, or, ideally, their combination. Examples of evidence-supported behavioral therapies are cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational incentives, and motivational interviewing. Medications are an important part of treatment for many patients, especially when combined with behavioral therapies.

**Q: Does the program tailor treatment to the needs of each patient?**

**A:** No single treatment is right for everyone. The best treatment addresses a person's various needs, not just his or her drug use. For example, a patient may require other medical services, family therapy, parenting support, job training, and social and legal services. Because substance use disorders and other mental disorders often occur together, a person with one of these conditions should be assessed for the other. And when these problems co-occur, treatment should address both (or all conditions).

**Q: Does the program adapt treatment as the patient's needs change?**

**A:** Individual treatment and service plans must be assessed and modified as needed to meet changing needs. For most people, a continuing care approach provides the best results, with treatment level adapted to a person's changing needs.

**Q: Is the duration of treatment sufficient?**

**A:** Research tells us that most addicted people need at least three months in treatment to really reduce or stop their drug use and that longer treatment times result in better outcomes. The best programs will measure progress and suggest plans for maintaining recovery.

**Q: How do 12-step or similar recovery programs fit into drug addiction treatment?**

**A:** Although they are not professional treatment, self-help groups can complement and extend the effects of professional treatment.

*Material adapted for PAStop by IRETA from "Seeking Drug Abuse Treatment: Know What to Ask" by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Sponsored by the Commonwealth Prevention Alliance through funding made available by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD)*

## How to Dispose of Unused Medicines

### There are Several Ways to Safely Dispose of Unused Medications:



- 1.** See if a drug take-back program is available in your community. There are medication drop boxes in many areas of the state for safe disposal. The PA Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs(DDAP) has a searchable database of take back locations. (Copy this link into your browser, or visit the PASTop.org website for a direct link: <https://apps.ddap.pa.gov/GetHelpNow/PillDrop.aspx>)
- 2.** Check with your local Drug and Alcohol Agency or police department to see if there are any medication take-back programs in your area, such as the ones previously held by the DEA.
- 3.** Throw the drugs in the household trash following these steps:
  - Remove them from their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter.
  - Place the mixture in a sealable bag, empty can, or other container to prevent the drug from leaking or breaking out of a garbage bag.

### Other Tips Before Throwing Out a Medicine Container:

- Remove/scratch out all identifying information on the prescription label to make it unreadable.
  - Do not give your medicine to friends. A medicine that works for you could be dangerous for someone else.
  - When in doubt about proper disposal, talk to your pharmacist.
- 4.** Some medications can be disposed of safely by flushing down the toilet, but, it is important to know which ones.

If the drug labeling/patient information instructs you to flush the medication or if it appears on the FDA list, flush it. If the medication does not appear on the FDA's list and the drug labeling/patient information does not specifically instruct you to do so, do not flush it. Refer to the following link for further information.

(Copy this link into your browser, or visit the PASTop.org website for a direct link: <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm>)

*Material adapted for PASTop by IRETA from "How to Dispose of Unused Medicines" by the Food and Drug Administration. Sponsored by the Commonwealth Prevention Alliance through funding made available by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD)*

## **Medication-Assisted Treatment For Opioid Addiction**

- **Medication**
- **Counseling**
- **Support from Family & Friends**



**M**edication-assisted treatment is one way to help those with opioid addiction recover their lives. There are three equally important parts to this form of treatment: medication, counseling, and support from family and friends.

These three parts work together to help people recover.

*Treatment helps people move into healthy, addiction-free lifestyles – into a way of living referred to as recovery.*

### **Addiction Can Be Treated**

Opioid addiction can be treated.

Treatment helps people stop using the problem drug. It helps them get through withdrawal and cope with cravings. Treatment also helps them move away from other harmful behaviors, such as drinking alcohol or abusing other drugs. Just as important, treatment helps people address life issues they might have that are tied to the addiction, such as feelings of low self-worth, a bad situation at work or home, or spending time with people who use drugs. In short, treatment helps people move into healthy, addiction-free lifestyles—into a way of living referred to as recovery.

Treatment may include medication.

### **Medication**

Medication-assisted treatment is treatment for addiction that includes the use of medication along with counseling and other support. Treatment that includes medication is often the best choice for opioid addiction.

If a person is addicted, medication allows him or her to regain a normal state of mind, free of drug-induced highs and lows. It frees the person from thinking all the time about the drug. It can reduce problems of withdrawal and craving. These changes can give the person the chance to focus on the lifestyle changes that lead back to healthy living.

Taking medication for opioid addiction is like taking medication to control heart disease or diabetes. It is NOT the same as substituting one addictive drug for another. Used properly, the medication does NOT create a new addiction. It helps people manage their addiction so that the benefits of recovery can be maintained.

There are three main choices for medication.

The most common medications used in treatment of opioid addiction are methadone and buprenorphine. Sometimes another medication, called naltrexone, is used. Cost varies for the different medications. This may need to be taken into account when considering treatment options.



**Medication-Assisted Treatment For Opioid Addiction** (continued)

Methadone and buprenorphine trick the brain into thinking it is still getting the problem opioid. The person taking the medication feels normal, not high, and withdrawal does not occur. Methadone and buprenorphine also reduce cravings.

Naltrexone helps overcome addiction in a different way. It blocks the effect of opioid drugs. This takes away the feeling of getting high if the problem drug is used again. This feature makes naltrexone a good choice to prevent relapse (falling back into problem drug use).

Methadone to treat addiction is dispensed only at specially licensed treatment centers. Buprenorphine and naltrexone are dispensed at treatment centers or prescribed by doctors.

Medication is matched to the person.

The right medication has been found when the person feels normal, has minor or no side effects, does not feel withdrawal, and has cravings under control.

Following directions is important, because taking the medication improperly can lead to overdose or death.

People can safely take treatment medication as long as needed— for months, a year, several years, even for life. Sometimes people feel that they no longer need the medication and would like to stop taking it. Use of methadone and buprenorphine must be stopped gradually to prevent withdrawal. Stopping naltrexone does not cause withdrawal. Plans to stop taking a medication should ALWAYS be discussed with a doctor.

**Counseling**

Counseling can provide encouragement and motivation to stick to treatment. It can teach coping skills and how to prevent relapse. And it can help people learn how to make healthy decisions, handle setbacks and stress, and move forward with their lives.

In group counseling, people connect with others in treatment and make new friends who don't use drugs. They can get these benefits from support groups, too. These are informal meetings of people facing similar challenges.

**Support from Family and Friends**

It is very hard to go through recovery alone. Support from family and friends can help a person make the decision to enter treatment and stick with it.