

# Chronic Opioid Therapy

## Dos and Don'ts to Help Avoid Problems

### Using Opioids Safely & Responsibly

Although opioids help many people with moderate to severe pain function and regain their quality of life, these strong pain medications are also highly sought after by people who are looking to misuse or abuse them.

The risk for abuse and diversion is why opioids are considered “controlled substances.” It's also why your provider might use certain risk management strategies – for example, treatment agreements, pill counts and urine testing – to document that you are taking your medication as prescribed. Remember, your health care team is on your side to help you get the pain relief you need.

DO	DON'T
<p><b>Follow your health care provider's instructions.</b> Ask questions if you don't understand how to properly take, store or get rid of unused or expired opioid medications.</p> <p><b>Read the information sheet and/or medication guide</b> that comes with your prescription.</p> <p><b>Report all side effects</b> to your health care provider.</p> <p><b>Tell your health care provider if you or someone in your family has a history of mental illness or substance abuse</b> (for example, alcoholism, abusing illicit drugs or being prone to other compulsive behaviors).</p> <p><b>Understand the difference between tolerance, physical dependence and addiction;</b> they aren't the same.</p> <p><b>Use a pain diary</b> to record your pain and how your treatment is working in between medical visits. <i>APF's Targeting Chronic Pain: Your Personal Notebook</i> is a great tool.</p> <p><b>Use one pharmacy for your opioid and other medications,</b> if possible.</p> <p><b>Safely store and dispose of opioids and other medications</b> to be sure that children, pets and others don't intentionally or accidentally take them. Put medicines in a locked cabinet and not in locations easily accessed by others (medicine cabinets, nightstands, purses or kitchen counters). Keep all medications in the original bottle.</p> <p><b>Keep careful track of when and how much medication you take.</b></p> <p><b>File a report with your local police department</b> if you suspect someone has stolen your prescription. You may save a life.</p>	<p><b>Change the dose of your pain medication</b> – taking more or less or skipping doses – without talking with your health care provider first. Taking a higher dose than is recommended can be dangerous, possibly deadly. Taking too little may result in unnecessary pain and suffering.</p> <p>If you are not getting pain relief or think your dose is too high, talk with your health care provider before making any changes.</p> <p><b>Share your medications</b> with anyone. Only a health care provider can decide whether someone needs pain medication.</p> <p><b>Drive or use heavy machinery</b> when you first start taking this kind of medication until your health care provider says it's alright.</p> <p><b>Crush or break pills.</b> You must never chew, cut, crush, or dissolve opioid tablets or open opioid capsules, unless specifically told to do so. Opioid patches must never be cut or folded and they need to stick to the skin completely.</p> <p><b>Use opioids to treat conditions other than pain</b> (sleep, bad mood, stress, or anxiety).</p> <p><b>Mix with alcohol, antihistamines, barbiturates or benzodiazepines.</b> All of these substances can make someone's breathing slower. When these are taken together, it can be life-threatening. Tell your health care team all of the medications, supplements and herbal products that you take to avoid dangerous interactions.</p> <p><b>Take any of your medications in the dark.</b> Turn on the light. Always double check that you are taking the right medicine at the right dose.</p>

#### Resources to Help

APF has a number of tools to help you. Visit [www.painfoundation.org](http://www.painfoundation.org) and check out:

- *Targeting Chronic Pain: Your personal notebook*
- *Treatment Options: Your Guide to Pain Management*
- PainSAFE at [www.painsafe.org](http://www.painsafe.org) for more information about how to safely use opioids and other pain therapies
- Expert Q&A on risk management strategies for opioid therapy
- PainAid, APF's online support community
- Chronic Opioid Therapy, Preparing for Your Appointments

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