

# Chronic Opioid Therapy

## Preparing for Your Appointments

*If you are prescribed an opioid to help manage your pain, there are many things you need to know. This worksheet will help you prepare for follow up medical appointments. Also refer to APF's Opioid Dos and Don't to stay safe and avoid problems.*

### Preparing for Follow-up Appointments

Your health care provider will want to assess whether the goals you both set for your opioid trial are being met (for example, you may have decided that you wanted to be able to perform a particular activity, reduce your pain to a certain level, improve sleep, or other personal goals). He or she will also want to know if you have any side effects and if you are taking the medication as directed.

At each visit, be prepared to talk about:

**1) Your pain** – Overall, has your pain:

- Gotten better
- Stayed the same
- Gotten worse
- Changed in some way (perhaps you have a new type of pain or it has moved to a different location, or maybe you have new symptoms)

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- Are there times of the day or certain activities or movements that make your pain worse? If yes, when/what are they?

**2) What you can/can't do** – describing your pain in terms of your function is probably the best way for your health care provider to know whether your pain treatment is working or not.

- Since your last appointment, are there activities that you still avoid because of the pain? Are there activities you are now able to do because of better pain relief?

- How does your pain interfere with your ability to:

(Circle: **0**=doesn't interfere **1**=a little difficult **2**=somewhat difficult **3**=very difficult **4**=unable to perform)

Tell your provider if any of these are new or continuing problems.	Sleep	0	1	2	3	4
	Get dressed	0	1	2	3	4
	Move around (walk, get into and out of car)	0	1	2	3	4
	Stand for a period of time (wait in line, cook)	0	1	2	3	4
	Lift 10 pounds (bags of groceries, small pet, infant)	0	1	2	3	4
	Exercise	0	1	2	3	4
	Be social/enjoy hobbies	0	1	2	3	4
	Be sexually intimate	0	1	2	3	4
	Work (fulfill required tasks of job)	0	1	2	3	4
	Other:	0	1	2	3	4

**TRACKING YOUR PAIN**  
Use the American Pain Foundation's *Targeting Chronic Pain* notebook ([www.painfoundation.org](http://www.painfoundation.org)) to record all of this information in one place.

**3) Side effects and other concerns** – have you had any of the following and for how long (circle: **days/weeks/months**):

- |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Constipation _____ (d/w/m)                                                                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Extreme tiredness/mental clouding _____ (d/w/m) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nausea/vomiting _____ (d/w/m)                                                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness _____ (d/w/m)                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Itching _____ (d/w/m)                                                                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced libido/sex drive _____ (d/w/m)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Any changes in your breathing while you are sleeping (based on reports from your family) _____ (d/w/m) |                                                                          |

Other side effects or concerns: \_\_\_\_\_

What, if anything, have you been doing to deal with these side effects? \_\_\_\_\_

**4) Other treatments you are trying/have tried** – for most types of pain, combining several strategies works best.

Tell your health care provider what other therapies you are using (for example, physical therapy and/or conditioning programs, cognitive/behavioral counseling, acupuncture, massage therapy, yoga, biofeedback, or assistive devices like a cane or walker). This will help him/her map out a comprehensive pain management plan to meet your needs.

**5) Changes in your general health and/or medications** – at each appointment, to review all of the medications you are taking – including any over-the-counter drugs and supplements – as well as any changes in your health status.

While taking an opioid, check with your health care provider:

- Before taking another medication that causes sleepiness or sedation (for example, antihistamines such as Benadryl and Zyrtec or benzodiazepines like Xanax or Valium); all of these can slow your breathing
- If you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant, develop acute or severe bronchial asthma or certain kidney problems, or have sleep apnea
- Any time you have a concern or have side effects, or if your pain isn't improving

Your health care provider may ask you additional questions to evaluate whether opioid therapy is working effectively and safely for you.

### 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.

### 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&As on risk management strategies for opioid therapy
- Opioid Dos and Don'ts to Avoid Problems
- PainAid, APF's online support community

This educational activity is supported through an educational grant from Endo Pharmaceuticals.