

Opioids for Children

There's a lot of buzz about opioid medicines.

People naturally have concerns or questions.

Recent research shows that in some cases, over-the-counter acetaminophen and NSAID pain medicines, like Tylenol and Advil, may work just as well as opioids.

So talk with your doctor about all the choices and combinations, and which medicines are opioids and which ones are not.

And be aware that some opioids already contain acetaminophen, and it can be dangerous to take too much acetaminophen.

Now, if your child does get a prescription for a common opioid medicine, like oxycodone, hydrocodone, or morphine, here's what you need to know.

Opioids can cause nausea and constipation.

If this happens, your doctor can recommend other medicines that can help.

Opioids need to be taken exactly as prescribed.

Your child may not be so concerned about this.

So you may need to keep track of the number of pills left and the time of the last dose.

If your child misses a dose, don't double the next dose.

It's really important to space out each dose with the minimum amount of time that it says on the label.

So there's never too much medicine in the body at one time.

Opioids can make your child sleepy.

Now, lots of kids are sleep-deprived, and likely to be cranky if you wake them.

But here are the serious, get-emergency-help-right-away signs of someone who may have taken too much opioid medicine.

They might not respond to their name or your touch.

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Their lips may be blue.

And it may be hard to feel them breathing.

Keep opioids out of reach and out of sight.

That means away from pets, other kids, and any visitors who may be tempted to peek into your medicine cabinet to see what they can find.

Opioids—more than other medicines— are only safe for the person they're prescribed for— no one else.

The dose the doctor prescribed is the right dose for your child now.

But it may not be safe for another person in another situation.

So when your child no longer needs the medicine, it's important to take the rest of the pills to a special disposal place, like a medicine drop-off box or take-back program.

Or you can mix the remaining pills in a plastic bag with something that tastes bad— like used coffee grounds— and put the bag in the trash.

And lastly, opioids should be taken for the least amount of time possible.

This reduces the chance of misuse and future problems.

Your doctor will do his or her best to prescribe them for the shortest amount of time that they're likely to be needed.

And you can do your part by helping wean your child off them as soon as your child starts to feel better.

So now you know a bit more about taking opioids safely.

It may be helpful to remember that pain is part of the normal healing process, and that there are ways to manage pain that are less risky than opioids— ways that you and your doctor should feel free to talk about.