

What Are Opioids?

What do oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, and heroin have in common?

All four are opioids.

That's right, your prescription pain medicine may be as dangerous as an illegal drug.

Now... that's not to scare you.

It's to help you understand how intense your pain may be.

It's the kind of pain that comes with cancer or after a serious surgery.

And that's why your doctor has prescribed such a powerful medicine.

Opioids--also called narcotics or opiates--are different because they change the way your brain deals with pain.

And that can change the way you feel about the pain.

They're also different because they can give you a feeling of well-being, cause mood changes, and affect your thinking and your sleep.

While opioids can help you manage pain, they can have side effects.

Some people feel dizzy, have nausea or vomiting, or become constipated.

And they also have serious risks.

For example, some people end up abusing opioids.

You can become dependent... "addicted"... to these medicines.

And that can lead to withdrawal if you quit taking them suddenly.

Are you at risk for addiction?

It can be hard to know.

So your doctor may ask you questions about your age and your physical and emotional health.

Work closely with your care provider and let that person know about any drug or alcohol problems you've had.

Opioids are safest when you use them exactly as your doctor prescribes.

Call your doctor if you miss a dose and aren't sure what to do.

Don't double your dose.

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Now you probably know that lots of medicines aren't safe to use with alcohol.

But when you're taking an opioid, it can be deadly to drink alcohol or use illegal drugs.

And while you're taking opioids, it's important to follow your doctor's directions for other prescription medicines like sleeping pills or sedatives.

So ask questions about medicines you should avoid.

And check with your doctor or pharmacist if you start taking something new.

Opioids are powerful medicines.

When taken as your doctor prescribes, they can help you manage your pain and help you feel better.