Side Effects of Long-Term Opioid Use

Overview
Opioids are powerful tools for controlling short-term pain. But using them for a long time can be dangerous. That's because long-term use causes severe side effects. Let's look at how they can impact you.

Digestive system
First, opioids can affect your digestive system. They can cause nausea and vomiting. They can cause constipation. And, they can cause your abdomen to become swollen. You may feel bloated and uncomfortable.

Liver and brain
Opioids can also affect your liver. They cause liver damage, especially if you use them along with acetaminophen. And, opioids can affect your breathing. While you're under the influence of opioids, your breathing may slow down so much that your body doesn't get the oxygen it needs. This can cause brain damage.

Dependence and Addiction
And finally, opioids are addictive. When you take an opioid for a long time, your body gets used to the drug. You may begin to need more and more to feel the effects. We say you've built up a "tolerance" for the drug. Eventually, your body begins to need the drug just to feel normal. When this happens, we say you are "dependent." Over time, you may find that nothing in your life is as pleasurable as the drug. You can't stop taking it, even though you know you should. This is "addiction." It's very dangerous.

Conclusion
Before you take an opioid medication, talk to your doctor about these possible side effects. Follow all of the instructions for taking your drug. And never take an opioid for longer than you need to.