

# Taking Opioids After You Have Surgery

If you have been prescribed opioids to control your pain after surgery, you may have many questions. Get answers now, and talk to your doctor if you still have questions or concerns.



Start by watching a video on pain management and safe opioid use after surgery. Go to [bit.ly/POSSEvideo](https://bit.ly/POSSEvideo).

## How much pain will I have after my surgery?

Pain after surgery is normal. The pain you feel depends on the type of surgery you have. Pain is usually worst right after surgery. It should get better, and easier to manage, as time passes. Talk to your doctor about how much pain to expect, and how you can manage your pain.

## What are opioids?

Opioid medications, also called narcotics, are one option to help you manage severe pain. You need a prescription from your doctor for opioid medications, and you must take them safely to lessen your risks. Names of opioids that are commonly prescribed after surgery:

Generic Drug Name	Brand Name
Acetaminophen and codeine	Tylenol #3, Tylenol #4
Codeine	
Hydrocodone	Lorcet, Lortab, Norco, Vicodin
Hydromorphone	Dilaudid, Exalgo
Morphine	Roxanol, MS Contin
Oxycodone	OxyContin, Percocet, Roxicodone, Endocet
Tramadol	ConZip, Rybix ODT, Ultram

## What are the risks of taking opioids?

The risks of taking opioids include misuse, addiction, overdose, and death. These risks increase if you combine opioids with other medications, like anti-anxiety medications, sedatives, sleep aids, and other opioids. Do not drink alcohol or use other substances while taking opioids. Before your surgery, talk to your doctor about your current medications. You can decrease your risk by taking opioids safely: follow your doctor's instructions, and take the lowest dose for the shortest amount of time.

## If I take opioids, will I become addicted?

Opioid use disorder (addiction) can begin with prescription opioids. Anyone can develop opioid use disorder. You may be at greater risk if you or a family member has had problems with alcohol or drugs (substance use disorder), or if you have a condition like depression or anxiety. Take the lowest dose of opioids for the shortest amount of time to minimize side effects and keep you safe. Talk to your doctor about your risk factors, and if taking opioids is safe for you.

## What should I do if I think I am addicted?

Immediately talk to your doctor or pharmacist. They can help you connect to resources and treatment options. If you need help finding treatment or funding for addiction treatment, call 1-800-662-HELP (4357). If you think someone may have overdosed, call 911 immediately.

If you need help finding treatment for addiction, call **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**.

## Do I have to take opioids?

You can refuse opioids if you think they are not the best option for you. Together, you and your surgeon can come up with a different plan for managing your pain. You can use ways to manage pain instead of, or in addition to, taking opioids:

- Taking medication that you can buy without a prescription (“over-the-counter”) like acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn)
- Getting enough rest
- Light activities like walking or stretching
- Mindfulness activities like deep breathing, meditation, or listening to music
- Other activities that you and your doctor agree might help you

## How can I take opioids safely?

Taking opioids safely can help lessen your risk for misuse, addiction, overdose, and death. Follow your doctor’s instructions, and take the lowest dose for the shortest amount of time. Only take opioids exactly as you are told to take them:

- Never take more opioids than you are told to take.
- Never take opioids more often than prescribed.
- Stop taking them when you no longer need them. You do not need to finish the entire bottle of medication.

## What side effects will I experience?

Common side effects of opioids include dizziness, itching, constipation, nausea, and feeling very tired. Serious side effects include trouble breathing, tolerance, and dependence. You can lessen your risk by taking opioids safely.

## How should I store my medication?

- Keep opioid medication in its original bottle in a safe place.
- Keep opioid medication away from children and pets.
- Keep track of the number of pills in the bottle, if you can.

## How should I get rid of unused medication?

Dispose of unused medication as soon as you no longer need it at a drug-take back site. Drug take-back sites, also called disposal sites, are places you can safely drop off your unused medication to get rid of it.

To find a drug take-back site near you, visit the website [bit.ly/POSSEdisposal](https://bit.ly/POSSEdisposal)

**My Drug Take-Back Site**

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## To take opioids safely, you should:

- Take them exactly as directed
- Take the lowest dose for the shortest amount of time
- Store them in the original container, in a safe location
- Stop taking them when you no longer need them
- Safely dispose of unused pills

**Opioids can have side effects and serious risks, including addiction. Your care team is here to help you manage your pain and get back to healthy living. Ask questions and talk about your concerns.**



### My Doctor

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

### Notes

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### My Pharmacy

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_