

# Opioid Medicines

## Information for Patients and Families

**You have been prescribed an opioid medicine for the treatment of pain or for another condition.**

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- Have questions about your opioid medicine.
- Do not understand the instructions for using the opioid medicine given to you.
- Develop side effects or your condition worsens.

### SERIOUS WARNINGS

- **Opioid overdose can lead to death.** Overdose is more likely to happen at higher doses, or if you take opioids with alcohol or with other sedating drugs (such as sleeping pills, anxiety medication, anti-depressants, muscle relaxants).
- **Addiction** may occur, even when opioids are used as prescribed.
- **Physical dependence** can occur when opioids are used every day. This can make it hard to stop using them.
- **Life-threatening breathing problems or reduced blood pressure** may occur with opioid use. Talk to your doctor about whether any health conditions you have may increase your risk.
- **Your pain may worsen** with long-term opioid use or at higher doses. You may not feel pain relief with further increases in your dose. Talk to your doctor if this happens to you, as a lower dose or a change in treatment may be required.
- **Withdrawal symptoms**, such as widespread pain, irritability, agitation, flu-like symptoms and trouble sleeping, are common when you stop or reduce the use of opioids.
- **Babies born to mothers taking opioids** may develop life-threatening withdrawal symptoms.
- **Use only as directed.** Crushing, cutting, breaking, chewing or dissolving opioids before consuming them can cause serious harm, including death.

### SIGNS OF OVERDOSE

- Hallucinations
- Confusion
- Difficulty walking
- Extreme drowsiness/dizziness
- Slow or unusual breathing
- Unable to be woken up
- Cold and clammy skin

**Call 911 right away if you suspect an opioid overdose or think you may have taken too much. \***

\* Naloxone has been approved by Health Canada to temporarily reverse known or suspected opioid overdoses.

### POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

- Reduced physical and/or mental abilities, depression
- Drowsiness, dizziness, risks of falls/fractures
- Heart palpitations, irregular heartbeat
- Problems sleeping, may cause or worsen sleep apnea
- Vision problems, headache
- Low sex drive, erectile dysfunction, infertility
- Severe constipation, nausea, vomiting

### YOUR OPIOIDS MAY BE FATAL TO OTHERS

- **Never give your opioid medicine to anyone.**
- Store opioids (including used patches) in a secure place to prevent theft, problematic use or accidental exposure.
- Keep opioids out of sight and reach of children and pets. Taking even one dose by accident can be fatal.
- Never throw opioids (including used patches) into household trash where children and pets may find them.
- Return expired, unused or used opioids (including patches) to a pharmacy for proper disposal.

**This handout is a summary and will not tell you everything about opioid medicines.**

More information about the opioid you have been prescribed (or naloxone) can be found online in the Product Monograph: <https://health-products.canada.ca/dpd-bdpp/index-eng.jsp>