

## WHAT ARE OPIOIDS

You may have heard people talking about opioids and not even realized it. Oxy, Percs, and Vikes are all slang terms for opioid pills.

Opioids are naturally found in the opium poppy plant. Some opioid medications are made from this plant while others are made by scientists in labs. Opioids have been used for hundreds of years to treat pain, cough, and diarrhea.

### What are the most commonly used opioids?

The most commonly used prescription opioids are oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, and morphine. Heroin is an opioid, but it is not a medication. [Fentanyl](#) is a powerful prescription pain reliever, but it is sometimes added to heroin by drug dealers, causing doses so strong that people are dying from overdoses.

### How do opioids work?

Only 1 in 100 young adults between the ages of 12 and 17 currently misuse prescription opioids.<sup>1</sup>

Your brain is full of molecules called receptors that receive signals from other parts of the body. Opioids attach to receptors on nerve cells in the brain, spinal cord, and other organs. This allows them to block pain messages sent from the body to the brain, which is why they are prescribed for serious injuries or illnesses.

When the opioids attach to the receptors, they also cause a large amount of dopamine to be released in the pleasure centers of the brain. Dopamine is the chemical responsible for making us feel reward and motivates our actions. The dopamine release caused by the opioids sends a rush of extreme pleasure and well-being throughout the body.

Image



## What are the health effects of opioids on the brain and body?

57% of 12- to 17-year olds who misused prescription opioids got them from a friend or relative.<sup>1</sup>

In the short term, the release of dopamine into your body can make some people feel really relaxed and happy. But it can also cause more harmful effects, like extreme sleepiness, confusion, nausea, vomiting, and constipation. Over time, opioids can lead to insomnia, muscle pain, heart infections, pneumonia, and addiction.

## What is prescription opioid misuse?

- Taking your prescription in ways other than instructed, like taking more than your prescribed dose or taking it more often
- Getting and using prescription pills from a friend or family member, even if it's for a real medical condition
- Taking prescription drugs to get high
- Mixing prescription opioids with alcohol or other drugs

I have an opioid prescription from my doctor; so, they can't be that bad, can they?

Prescription opioids are used to treat severe pain. People who have major surgeries including dental work, serious sports injuries, or cancer are sometimes prescribed these pills to manage their pain. When taken as prescribed, opioids are relatively safe and can reduce pain in the short term. But if a person misuses the drug and doesn't take them as prescribed, opioids can have dangerous consequences.

Is it safe to take my friend's prescription opioids if I get hurt playing soccer?

Taking someone else's prescription medicine, even if you are in real pain, can be dangerous. Before prescribing opioids, doctors consider a lot of different factors, including the patient's weight, other medical conditions, and potential interactions with other medications they might be taking. Without talking to a doctor, you won't know how the opioids will affect you or what dose you should take. You should never share prescription opioids and only use them when prescribed to you by a doctor.