



How You Can Avoid or Quit Addictive Pain Medication and Return to an Active Lifestyle

With the opioid crisis in the United States, it's important to be educated on how you can avoid opioid addiction, how to safely quit opioid use and what to expect after quitting addictive pain medication.

The United States uses more opioids than any other country in the world. The opioid epidemic started with physicians simply wanting to do the best thing for their patients, relieve their pain.

Despite the risks associated with opioid use, they are often an effective option for acute, short-term pain. Your doctor may prescribe opioids to help you get through a few days of severe pain after surgery or a traumatic injury. Opioid medications also play an important role in treating cancer-related pain and, rarely, chronic, non-cancer pain when other treatments haven't worked.

However, pain is complex and not all pain needs to be addressed by using opioids or other addictive pain medication.

"Before starting opioids, a patient should discuss with their physician pain relief expectations and the expected duration of time that opioids will be prescribed," said Dr. Mark Osborne, OrthoIndy physiatrist. "For many patients, the limited expected results of these medications does not justify their potential side effects."

According to Dr. Osborne, a physical medicine and rehabilitation physician, non-opioid pain medication is often just as successful, if not more successful, at treating pain.

How to Avoid Addiction to Opioid Pain Medication

Physical dependence on opioids can occur any time a patient has received opioids. To avoid dependency or addiction to opioids, it is best to follow a physician's orders and ask questions if you feel uneasy about an opioid prescription.



Is your medication considered an opioid?

Opioids are a class of drugs naturally found in the opium poppy plant. Some prescription opioids are made from the plant directly, and others are made by scientists in labs using the same chemical structure.

Common Prescription Opioids

- Codeine
- Fentanyl
- Hydrocodone (Vicodin®)
- Oxycodone (OxyContin®, Percocet®)
- Morphine (Kadian®, Avinza®)
- Oxymorphone (Opana®)
- Ultram (Tramadol)

Ask your doctor if you don't know whether your painkiller is an opioid.



Questions to Ask if You Are Prescribed Opioids

1. **Is there any way I can avoid or delay opioids for my pain?** If you are experiencing chronic pain, opioids are often not an effective or safe treatment option. Ask your physician about other treatments such as meeting with a physiatrist, physical therapist or other non-opioid pain medication prescriptions.
2. **Is my prescription the lowest effective dose, for the shortest period necessary?** In most acute pain cases, opioids are not necessary for more than three days after surgery or a broken bone.
3. **When can I expect to stop taking opioids for my pain?** Your doctor should have a goal in mind or a treatment plan that you can understand.
4. **Will this prescription help me reach my goals to live a normal pain-free life?** Your doctor should help you regain function and improve your quality of life, often opioids mask the pain but do not help you live a normal life.
5. **How often can I meet with you for a follow-up appointment?** Your doctor should require frequent visits to check-in with your progress.
6. **How can I minimize withdrawals when I stop opioids?** If your doctor prescribes opioids, they should also have a plan in place to help you stop opioids slowly and safely without severe side effects.

How to Safely Quit Opioid Pain Medication

Never quit opioids cold turkey on your own. Not only could it put you at a risk for failure, but there are also various serious health consequences.

"If you want to stop using opioids, first and most importantly, ask your doctor for a plan to follow," said Dr. Osborne. "There are many non-opioid alternatives to safely and effectively manage your pain."

Signs that it's Time to Stop Opioid Medication Use:

- Serious physical side effects
- Mood changes
- Reduced pain relief
- Misuse, abuse or addiction
- Accidental overdose

Opioid Withdrawal Symptoms

- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Drowsiness
- Anxiety
- Inability to sleep
- Increased pain
- Rapid heartbeat
- Confusion or hallucinations
- Blood pressure changes
- Sweating or fevers

If you experience any withdrawal symptoms, contact your doctor right away.

Steps To Safely Quitting Opioid Pain Medication

1. **Develop a medication withdrawal plan with a doctor:** This is also referred to as a taper and it gradually reduces the amount of medication you take.
2. **Realize it will take time:** Opioid withdrawal can be severe. Depending on the dose it may take weeks or months to gradually reduce your dose.
3. **Don't give up:** Quitting opioids is difficult, however, you can do it by following your doctor's treatment plan.
4. **Learn alternative ways to cope with pain:** Ask your doctor about managing your pain without the use of opioids.

Tips for Managing Opioid Withdrawal

- Eat regularly
- Drink plenty of liquids
- Be positive and surround yourself with supportive people
- Find ways to relax
- Exercise in moderation
- Stretch and practice deep breathing exercises
- Do something to keep yourself distracted

“ As a physical medicine and rehabilitation physician, we can help you live a pain-free lifestyle without the use of opioids. We can treat your pain through a non-operative approach with the use of non-opioid medication, therapy and minimally invasive procedures. ”

- Dr. Osborne, OrthoIndy physiatrist who specializes in physical medicine and rehabilitation

Life After Opioid Addiction

If you have successfully tapered off opioid pain medication, you may begin to see life a little more clearly. You will probably return to your normal life including work, family, friends and hobbies.

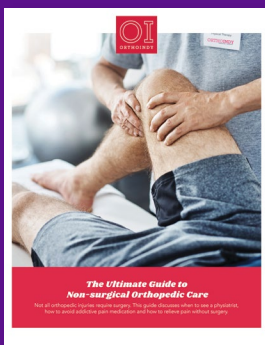
However, you may continue to be tempted by or crave opioid use. It's important to have a plan for continuing care.

Continuing Care Options for Life After Opioid Use

- One-on-one therapy
- Alternative support groups
- Regular checkups with a health professional

"You may have an acute pain problem in the future, such as an injury or surgery, where a doctor may recommend taking opioids for a period of time," said Dr. Osborne. "Be sure to tell your doctor that you tapered off opioids in the past. He or she can help you with the best treatment option for your situation based on your needs."

To help you better understand what physiatry is, why you might seek the care of a physiatrist and how a physiatrist treats orthopedic-related conditions, read our *Ultimate Guide to Non-surgical Orthopedic Care*.



Enjoying Life Again

When patients are no longer taking opioid medication, they can begin enjoying life again.

"After stopping opioid use, many patients return to a more active and normal lifestyle," said Dr. Osborne. "With the right alternative to opioids, OrthoIndy physiatrists help patients return to activities they never thought would be possible again with their pain."



With years of experience and the most advanced technology, OrthoIndy physiatrists will give you the best chance possible to achieve your goals. **Make an appointment** and let OrthoIndy's team of experts help you get normal back, whatever your normal looks like.



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