



Visit your doctor to talk about your health and the medicines you may need. This factsheet will give you information about a type of medicine. You will learn what questions you should ask your doctor about this medicine. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is very important for your health.

Medicines to Treat Pain

Have you been in a lot of pain for a long period of time? Is your pain so strong that it is affecting your life? If your answer is “yes” then take the time to learn about some options you have to treat your pain. This factsheet tells you about one kind of drug that is used to treat pain.



What are opioids?

Opioids are the strongest medicines available to help relieve pain. They also help you rest and sleep better.

Opioids can work in different ways. Some can relieve your pain for a short period of time (between 3 to 4 hours) while others work for a longer period of time (between 12 to 24 hours). There are even other opioids that can help you feel better within minutes.



When do doctors decide to give opioids to you?

Doctors use opioids to treat patients with acute and chronic pain.

Acute pain is the kind of pain people may feel after a surgery, or from an injury like a broken arm or a burn, or an illness like appendicitis. This type of pain usually goes away when the person heals.

Chronic pain is the kind of pain that lasts for a long period of time (more than 3 months). For example, people with arthritis or with back injuries may have chronic pain. People who suffer from very serious diseases like cancer or terminal illnesses and who are at the end of their life can also have chronic pain.

Doctors do not have a problem with using opioids to treat acute pain, or chronic pain if a patient is at the end of his/her life. However, when it comes to treating a person with chronic pain that will last for a long period of time like in cases of osteoarthritis or fibromyalgia, then it can become difficult for doctors to decide whether or not to use opioids.

Why is this? Because a person who takes opioids for a long period of time may:

- Not be able to control the amount of drugs they take and become addicted.

- Develop tolerance to the medicine, which means your body gets used to the medicine and it can no longer relieve the pain like before. Over time you may need more and more medicine to relieve the pain.
- Take more medicine than needed by accident, which can be deadly.
- Have side effects like constipation, nausea, vomiting, itching, depression, slow breathing, lack of interest in sex, feeling very sleepy, etc.



Then....do opioids really work?

Opioids work really well to treat acute pain but they do not work very well to treat pain that lasts for a long period of time because:

- Opioids may not relieve all the pain a person could have
- Some people feel so bad from the side effects that they may have to stop taking opioids
- In some cases, people may even feel more pain over time



So, what other options do doctors have to treat chronic pain?

Doctors may treat chronic pain with physical therapy, massage, relaxation therapy, and acupuncture. You can try these alternatives treatments and still take medicine if you need it.

In some cases, medicines like *acetaminophen* (brand-name *Tylenol* and generic), are all that are needed to help relieve pain. If a person has inflammation (or swelling) the doctor may use *ibuprofen* (brand-name *Advil* and generic) and *naproxen* (brand-name *Aleve* and generic).

Doctors may use other medicines to treat different health problems like depression, migraines, or seizures. In some cases, surgery or injections may be an option.

You and your doctor should consider these options before you take an opioid because opioids alone are rarely enough to treat chronic pain over a long period of time.



In the United States, “generic” medicines are just as good as brand-name medicines. They are very safe and work just like the brand-name medicine, and they cost a lot less money. Ask your doctor if you can get a generic medicine instead of a brand-name medicine.



How to decide if you should use opioids?

Your decision will depend on how strong your pain is and if you are able to work and live with your pain. If you cannot stand your pain, an opioid should NOT be your first option to treat it. Talk with your doctor about the options we described above to get the treatment that best fits your health needs.



Which opioids should you take?

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs evaluated the medicines to treat pain by comparing how well they work, how safe they are, and their cost. *Consumer Reports* recommends the generic opioid medicine listed below to treat chronic pain when other pain relievers do not work:

- ***Morphine extended-release***

If you have to take this medicine in low doses every day, you may pay less than \$101 a month.

To learn more about this topic go to:

<http://consumerreports.org/health/best-buy-drugs/opioids.htm>



How to Get the Best Price for Your Medicines

- **Ask for a generic:** Tell your pharmacist you want a generic medicine instead of the brand-name. You will pay less for a generic. Not all brand-name medicines have a generic, but many do.
- **Compare prices:** Call or visit three different pharmacies. Give them the name of the medicine and ask how much it costs. Ask if they have a drug discount program that can help you pay less for your medicine. Buy your medicine from the pharmacy that gives you the cheapest price.
- **Sign up for patient assistance programs:** Most companies that make medicines have programs that help people that don't have a lot of money and do not have insurance to get brand-name medicines for free or at a low cost. The Partnership for Prescription Assistance can help you find a program: www.pparx.org or 1-888-477-2669.

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