



Substance Use

Opioid painkillers

Do I have a problem - what is drug addiction?

It affects a person's brain and behavior, and leads to an inability to limit or moderate the use of a drug or medication. When you're addicted, you may continue using the substance despite the harm and consequences it causes. Addiction can start with experimental use of a substance in social situations, which may become more frequent, or if you are abusing a prescribed medication. As time passes, you may need larger doses of the drug to get high or reduce pain. Soon you may need the drug just to feel normal. As your drug use increases, it's difficult to go without the drug and attempts to stop may cause intense cravings and make you feel physically ill (withdrawal symptoms).

What are opioid painkillers and how do they affect you?

Opioids are narcotic, pain relieving drugs produced from opium or made synthetically. This class of drugs includes, among others, heroin, morphine, codeine, methadone and oxycodone. Opioid use may start out as a prescribed medication for pain, but once the prescription ends some people may seek the drug through other means.

Signs and symptoms of use and dependence include:

- Reduced sense of pain
- Agitation, drowsiness or sedation
- Slurred speech
- Problems with attention and memory
- Constricted pupils
- Lack of awareness or inattention to surroundings
- Problems with coordination
- Depression
- Confusion
- Constipation
- Runny nose or nose sores (if snorting drugs)
- Needle marks (if injecting drugs)

Complications of dependency include:

- Multiple short-term and long-term mental and physical health problems
- Psychosis, seizures, overdose, or death
- Physical changes to some nerve cells (neurons) in your brain
- Getting an infectious disease
- Engaging in dangerous behavior
- Marital and family problems
- Failing to fulfill obligations or put others at risk at work or home
- Legal issues and financial problems

Where can you turn for support?

In addition to a health care professional, you can seek support from a trusted friend, colleague or family member. Your union or HR rep can provide referrals, including financial resources. National and local resources are available to both the individual and to those offering support, and include:

- SAMHSA Substance Use Treatment Locator – <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment> – 1-800-662-4357
- Entertainment Industry Therapists Finder – btshelp.org/findatherapist

You can find links to self diagnostic tools at btshelp.org/substanceuse