



Northwestern Medicine is committed to the responsible use of opioids for pain management. Opioids should be used, stored and disposed of with caution.



Northwestern Memorial HealthCare
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Narcotic pain relievers now cause or contribute to nearly

3 OUT OF 4
prescription drug overdoses and about
15,500 DEATHS A YEAR

-Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Prescription Opioids

What You Need to Know



Safe use and disposal of opioids

Northwestern Medicine is committed to helping you manage your pain. Your physician will consider a variety of pain management options, including opioids. Opioids should be used, stored and disposed of with caution.

Opioids are medicines that act on the nervous system to relieve pain. They come in tablet, capsule, liquid or patch forms. When taken correctly and safely, opioids can help to relieve severe pain.

The most common opioids are:

Oxycodone (OxyContin®)

Hydrocodone (Vicodin®, Norco®)

Morphine

Codeine

Tramadol (Ultram®)

Other types of opioids include:

Methadone

Buprenorphine

Fentanyl

Heroin (not a prescription medicine)

Careful use of opioids

Opioids are powerful pain killers that are also highly addictive. Opioid tolerance and dependence can occur over time if you take opioids regularly.

- **Tolerance** means you need to take more of the drug for the same pain relief.
- **Dependence** means you have withdrawal symptoms when you stop taking the medication.

Half of deaths due to drug overdose are related to prescription drugs. But, overdose and death are rare when prescription drugs are taken as prescribed by a physician.

- Be sure to take opioid medicines exactly as prescribed by your physician.
- Take opioids only when you need them for pain.
- Do not take opioids when you no longer need them for pain.
- **Do not share** your opioid medicines with others.

Protect your family and friends

Most opioids misused for non-medical purposes were originally prescribed by a physician. To avoid misuse by others, safely store your opioid medicines.

- Store opioids in a locked cabinet or box and out of reach of children.
- Store opioids in the original bottle with the label attached and cap secured.
- Keep track of the location of your medicine.
- Keep track of how many pills are left in your bottle.

Disposal of your medicine

If you do not use all of your prescription medicine, do not throw it in the garbage can.

To keep it secure from misuse by others and to avoid negative environmental effects, seek a safe disposal option.

Find safe drug take-back sites in your community.

If a take-back option is not available, you may be able to pick up an approved drug destruction kit at your pharmacy.

Ask your physician about how to safely dispose of your opioids.

To find a safe drug take-back site close to you, visit:

[nm.org/safemeddisposal](https://www.nm.org/safemeddisposal)

**Call the Drug Enforcement Administration
Diversion Control Division at
800.882.9539 (7:30 am to 4:50 pm CT)**

Always call the take-back site to confirm hours of operation.