



What Are Opioids?



Opioids are a class of drugs used for medical and non-medical reasons. Opioids are mainly prescribed for medical purposes to:

- To relieve short- and long-term pain from surgery, injury or a health condition; or
- To manage an opioid use disorder or addiction, including symptoms of withdrawal.

Examples of opioids:

codeine, fentanyl, morphine, oxycodone, tramadol, hydromorphone, heroin, methadone, buprenorphine-naloxone



Opioids are sometimes used for non-medical purposes to experience a “high,” inducing feelings of wellbeing and euphoria.

Non-medical use of opioids includes using opioids that are:

- Not prescribed to you but are taken from someone else
- Prescribed to you but not using them as directed (e.g., taking a higher dose than recommended by a healthcare provider)
- From the illegal market



THE RISKS OF USING OPIOIDS

Short-term Effects	Long-term Effects
Drowsiness and dizziness Headaches and confusion Constipation Nausea Difficulty breathing Euphoria (feeling excitement or happiness)	Liver damage Worsening pain Tolerance and physical dependence Opioid use disorder or addiction

Long-term use of opioids can lead to tolerance, meaning higher or more frequent doses are needed to feel the same effects. This pattern of use can cause your body to become dependent on opioids and can develop into an opioid use disorder.

Some people have a higher risk of developing physical dependence or opioid use disorder due to factors such as genetic profile, personal or family history of substance use disorders, or experiences of trauma.



If you or someone you know needs support for their opioid use, addiction or opioid use disorder, **Finding Quality Addiction Care** can help you to find services in your area.



HARMS RELATED TO NON-MEDICAL OPIOID USE

Many of the severe harms associated with opioids come from non-medical use, particularly the use of opioids from the illegal market. Drugs bought on the illegal market are often contaminated with substances, like fentanyl, that can put your health at risk and even be fatal.



Fentanyl is a powerful type of opioid that is prescribed to treat severe or long-term pain.

The illegal drug supply in Canada has become contaminated with fentanyl, increasing the risk of accidental overdose. You can't know how much fentanyl has been mixed into illegal drugs because you can't see, smell or taste it. Just a few grains of fentanyl can cause death.



IF YOU ARE PRESCRIBED OPIOIDS:

- Take them as prescribed
- Avoid mixing them with other substances, like alcohol
- Store them in a safe place
- Take unused opioids to a pharmacy for proper disposal
- Get a free naloxone kit from the pharmacy (naloxone can temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose)
- Know how to recognize and respond to an overdose