

# Prescription Opioids: What You Need to Know

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Prescription opioids are used to help relieve moderate-to-severe pain. Opioids are used most often immediately following a surgery or to temporarily control the pain such as with urinary stones. These medications are an important part of treatment and recovery but also come with serious risks.

**What are Opioids?** The most common opioids prescribed in urology are Vicodin® and Norco (both hydrocodone). Morphine may be used in the hospital immediately following surgery.

**What are the Risks and Side Effects of Opioid Use?** Opioids carry serious risks of addiction and overdose, especially with prolonged use. An opioid overdose, often marked by slow breathing, can cause sudden death. The use of prescription opioids can have a number of side effects as well, even when taken as directed:

- Tolerance – Long term use might make you need to take more of the medication for the same pain relief.
- Physical dependence – you may have symptoms of withdrawal with the medication is stopped.
- Increased sensitivity to pain
- Constipation
- Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth
- Sleepiness and dizziness
- Confusion
- Depression
- Low levels of testosterone

## **Risks are Greater with:**

- History of drug misuse, substance use disorder
- Mental health conditions (such as depression or anxiety)
- Sleep apnea
- Older age (65 years or older)
- Pregnancy

## **Things to Avoid when taking Opioids:**

- Alcohol
- Medications: (talk to your physician if you are taking any of these medications)
  - such as Xanax or Valium
  - Muscle relaxants (such as Soma or Flexeril)
  - Sleeping pills (such as Ambien or Lunesta)
  - Other prescription opioids

**Know Your Options:** Talk to your doctor about other ways to manage your pain that don't involve prescription opioids. Some of these options may actually work better. These may include:

Pain relievers such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, ketorolac or naproxen. Physical therapy and exercise.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (a psychological, goal-directed approach) in which patients learn how to modify physical, behavioral and emotional triggers or pain and stress.

## **If you are prescribed opioids for pain:**

- ✓ Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed
- ✓ Store prescription opioids in a secure place out of reach of others
- ✓ Safely dispose of unused opioids: Find your community drug take-back program or flush them down the toilet. <https://nabp.pharmacy/initiatives/awarxe/drug-disposal-locator/>

If you believe you may be struggling with addiction please talk to me or to your primary care provider.

***\* By law, opioids may not be called, faxed or e-prescribed to the pharmacy and require a special prescription.***