

# TIPS for TEENS

## OPIOIDS

### THE TRUTH ABOUT OPIOIDS

**SLANG: O.C./OXY/PERCS/VIKE/M/MONKEY/  
WHITE STUFF/LEAN/SCHOOLBOY/SIZZURP/  
PURPLE DRANK/LOADS**

## GET THE FACTS

**OPIOIDS AFFECT YOUR BRAIN.** Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine, and many others.<sup>1</sup> They affect both the spinal cord and brain to reduce the intensity of pain-signal perception as well as brain areas that control emotion.<sup>2</sup> They can also affect the brain to cause euphoria or “high.”<sup>3</sup>

**OPIOIDS AFFECT YOUR BODY.** Opioids slow down the actions of the body, such as breathing and heartbeat. Even a single dose of an opioid can cause severe respiratory depression (slowing or stopping of breathing), which can be fatal; taking opioids with alcohol or sedatives increases this risk.<sup>4</sup>

**OPIOIDS ARE ADDICTIVE.** Even though heroin is highly addictive, more people struggle with addiction to prescription pain relievers.<sup>5</sup> Many young people who inject heroin report misuse of prescription opioids before starting to use heroin.<sup>6</sup>

**OPIOIDS CAN KILL YOU.** Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, with 68,690 drug overdose deaths between March 2017 and March 2018.<sup>7</sup> More than 46,000 of those deaths involved opioids.<sup>8</sup>

**OPIOID ADDICTION IS TREATABLE.** Methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone are medications that are FDA-approved to treat opioid use disorder. For more information, visit <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/medications-to-treat-opioid-addiction/efficacy-medications-opioid-use-disorder>.

## ? Q&A

**Q. MY DOCTOR PRESCRIBED ME OPIOIDS. DOESN'T THAT MEAN THEY'RE SAFE?**

**A.** Prescription opioids—when used long term or incorrectly—can cause the brain to become reliant on the drug and are addictive.<sup>9</sup>

**Q. IF I USE OPIOIDS, WILL I BECOME ADDICTED?**

**A.** Prescription opioids can cause physical dependence when used as directed or addiction if misused; illegal opioids such as heroin are also highly addictive. People who regularly use prescription opioids or heroin often develop tolerance, which means that they need higher and/or more frequent doses of the drug to get the desired effects.<sup>10</sup>

### THE BOTTOM LINE:

Many people are prescribed opioids out of medical necessity, but opioids can still be dangerous and addictive. Even if someone is prescribed one of these medications—such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, and morphine—misuse of these substances is rampant. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust if you have questions.

### LEARN MORE:

Get the latest information on how drugs affect the brain and body at [teens.drugabuse.gov](https://teens.drugabuse.gov).

### TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OPIOIDS, CONTACT:

**SAMHSA**  
**1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)**  
(English and Español)

**TTY 1-800-487-4889**  
**[www.samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)**  
**[store.samhsa.gov](https://store.samhsa.gov)**



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration



# BEFORE YOU RISK IT!

- 1 KNOW THE LAW.** Heroin is illegal and addictive.<sup>11</sup> If you are caught with prescription opioids that are not yours, you can be imprisoned, fined, or both.<sup>12</sup>
- 2 KNOW THE RISKS.** Using opioids repeatedly can lead to higher tolerance.<sup>13</sup> Other risks include addiction and overdose death.
- 3 LOOK AROUND YOU.** A recent study found that 38.5 percent of the people who misused prescription pain relievers got them from a friend or relative for free; 34.6 percent were prescribed the medication by one doctor.<sup>14</sup>



## KNOW THE SIGNS

How can you tell if a friend is using opioids?

Side effects of opioid use include:<sup>15</sup>

- **Constipation, nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth;**
- **Sleepiness and dizziness;**
- **Confusion;**
- **Decreased breathing; and**
- **Itching and sweating.**

Behavioral signs and symptoms of opioid addiction include:<sup>16</sup>

- **A change in peer group;**
- **Carelessness with grooming;**
- **Decline in academic performance;**
- **Missing classes or skipping school;**
- **Loss of interest in favorite activities;**
- **Changes in eating or sleeping habits; and**
- **Deteriorating relationships with family and friends.**



## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS USING OPIOIDS?

### BE A FRIEND. SAVE A LIFE.

Encourage your friend to stop using or seek help from a parent, teacher, or other caring adult.

**For 24/7 free and confidential information and treatment referrals in English and Español, call SAMHSA's National Helpline at:**

**1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357) or visit the SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator at [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov)**

<sup>1</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2018). Opioids. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids>

<sup>2</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2018). Misuse of Prescription Drugs. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/which-classes-prescription-drugs-are-commonly-misused>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2014). The Facts About Buprenorphine. Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4442.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Jones, C. M., Paulozzi, L. J., & Mack, K. A. (2014). Alcohol involvement in opioid pain reliever and benzodiazepine drug abuse-related emergency department visits and drug-related deaths - United States, 2010. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 63(40), 881-885. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6340a1.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2017). Medications for Opioid Use Disorder. Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma18-5063pt2.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2018). Prescription opioids and heroin. *Research Report Series*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/relationship-between-prescription-drug-heroin-abuse/prescription-opioid-use-risk-factor-heroin-use>

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). (2018). Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

<sup>8</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2018). Opioid Overdose Crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids>

<sup>9</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2018). What is heroin? *Drug Facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/heroin>

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Justice & Drug Enforcement Administration. (2015). *Drugs of abuse: A DEA resource guide*. Retrieved from [https://www.dea.gov/pr/multimedia-library/publications/drug\\_of\\_abuse.pdf](https://www.dea.gov/pr/multimedia-library/publications/drug_of_abuse.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Addiction.com. (2015). Before You Share That Pain Medication. Retrieved from <https://www.addiction.com/12040/before-you-share-that-pain-medication/>

<sup>12</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2016). Opioids. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/atod/opioids>

<sup>13</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2018). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2017-nsduh-annual-national-report>

<sup>14</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). Opioid Overdose. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/prescribed.html>

<sup>15</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2014). *Principles of adolescent substance use disorder treatment: A research-based guide*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-adolescent-substance-use-disorder-treatment-research-based-guide/frequently-asked-questions/what-are-signs-drug-use-in-adolescents-what-role-can-parents-play-in-getting-treatment>

## MORE INFORMATION



**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR FOR RESOURCES USED IN THIS "TIPS for TEENS," visit [store.samhsa.gov](https://store.samhsa.gov) or call 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) (English and Español).**  
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