

# Signs & symptoms of opioid abuse

Opiate addiction is becoming more rampant every day. Drug overdose is now the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, edging out car accidents in 2014. Opioid pain relievers are responsible for more overdose deaths than cocaine and heroin combined. If you or your loved one has been prescribed an opioid to relieve pain, it's important to know the difference between using and abusing the drug.

In people with no history of drug addiction who take opiates for chronic pain, studies have not found clear-cut predictors of who is more or less likely to eventually abuse their painkillers. For this reason, narcotics abuse is one of the most common forms of drug abuse in the U.S. (It doesn't matter who you are, this can happen to you even if it's not intentional).

## Know what to look for

Opiate addiction can be hard to recognize—the following list of symptoms could indicate a potential issue.

### Behavioral symptoms

- Opioids are used for longer or at a greater amount than intended
- Unsuccessful attempts to decrease the amount taken
- Large amount of time spent obtaining, using, or recovering from the drug
- Early refills for prescription opioids

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pain patients reported misusing  
their opioid Rx medicines

*Report: Prescribers, Patients and Pain, Partnership  
for Drug-Free Kids, April 29, 2015*

- Abandonment of important activities (including failure to meet obligations and decreasing time spent in recreational activities)
- Spending money on unidentifiable purchases or being secretive about ways money is being spent
- Decrease in personal hygiene and appearance
- Doctor shopping
- Stealing money from loved ones or stealing prescription pills out of household medicine cabinets

*Source: WebMD Understanding Narcotics Abuse.*



- Agitation and restlessness, particularly in the morning
- An unusual shift from tranquil relations with others to volatile interpersonal relationships

#### **Physical symptoms**

- Tendency to nod off or appear to be extremely drowsy
- Eye pupil constriction, red and/or glassy eyes
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Frequent sniffly or runny nose
- Increased constipation
- Complaints of nausea and/or vomiting

#### **Mood/Psychological symptoms**

- Sudden mood changes
- Demonstrating unusual or atypical moods

#### **It can happen to anyone**

Opioid medications are intended to relieve pain, however, as the brain becomes used to feeling better, it often takes more and more of the drug to produce the same levels of pain relief and well-being, leading to dependence and later, addiction.

If you or a loved one is at risk of opioid addiction, it's important to seek help as soon as possible.

#### **Additional resources**

##### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

The CDC website features a section devoted to opioid information, data and FAQs. In addition, there are guidelines for prescribing opioids for

chronic pain to help ensure patients have access to safer treatment options.

[cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/patients.html](http://cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/patients.html)

##### **National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)**

NIDA provides information on commonly abused drugs, the latest science and treatments, trends and statistics to improve individual and public health.

[drugabuse.gov](http://drugabuse.gov)

##### **The American Society of Addiction Medicine**

A society of physicians aimed at increasing access to addiction treatment. They offer a nationwide directory of addiction medicine professionals.

[asam.org](http://asam.org)

##### **The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

Find locations for residential, outpatient, and hospital inpatient treatment programs for drug addiction and alcoholism throughout the country.

[findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov) or  
1-800-662-HELP

##### **The Partnership at Drugfree.org**

Provides information and resources on teen drug use and addiction for parents to help them prevent and intervene in their children's drug use or find treatment for a child who needs it.

[drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org) or 1-855-378-4373

*This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.*