

# Behaviors associated with opioid addiction

The development of an addiction to prescription opioids and other such powerful drugs almost always results in a changing spectrum of behaviors on the part of the person using the drugs.

## What is an opioid?

An opioid is a medication that relieves pain and reduces the intensity of pain signals that affect the area of the brain that controls emotions.

In a progressive manner, the opioid addiction creeps up on its victims and begins to take over their lives. What may have begun as a prescription for pain, or recreational use, can become a central part of the individual's day. Finding and using drugs may become their primary focus; all other daily routines and responsibilities become secondary to the fulfilling the need for the drug.

## Recognizing the behaviors of addiction

Repeated observation of the changing types of behaviors by a friend or loved one often triggers an instinctual suspicion that the other individual is abusing drugs. One way to approach the issue is to do it in a non-confrontational manner. Ask the individual if he or she is experiencing a problem or struggle with the use of an opioid prescription with which help might be needed.

Although the individual may deny the problem, it is best to strive for open communication in order to help the individual obtain the needed treatment.

Here is a list of common behaviors that often accompany opioid addiction problems:

- Decrease in personal hygiene and appearance, such as taking showers less frequently, skipping laundry and wearing dirty clothing
- Stopping or reducing important social, work or recreational activities because of opioid use
- Arriving late (or not at all) to appointments, with little to no explanation; demonstrating an uncharacteristic lack of respect for others
- Spending sources of income on unidentifiable purchases, e.g., selling off valuable collectible items for secretive reasons
- Spending a great deal of time in activities necessary to obtain, use, or recover from the effects of the opioid
- Lashing out at family members; mood swings; irritability
- Agitation and restlessness, particularly in the morning or when the individual's supply of opiate drugs may have been depleted
- Continuing to use opioids despite experiencing many social or interpersonal problems caused or made worse by the effects of opioids
- Using opioids to the extent that there is a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home



Common opioids include hydrocodone, oxycodone, morphine, and codeine. These drugs are typically prescribed by physicians and can be highly addictive.

### Additional Resources

#### National Institute on Drug Abuse

[www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-are-opioids](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-are-opioids)

#### Family Doctor

<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/opioid-addiction.html>

#### Drugfree.org

[www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

- An unusual shift from tranquil relations with others into volatile interpersonal relationships
- Early refills for prescription opioids
- Incorrectly taking and using opioids.
- Stealing money from loved ones; stealing prescription pills out of household medicine cabinets; getting into legal trouble as a result of stealing or engaging in drug trade
- “Doctor shopping” whereby the individual using opioids cycles between seeing different physicians; he or she is typically striving to obtain a prescription for an opioid or otherwise pretending to have symptoms in order to obtain the drug.