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# PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLERS

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**NYC**<sup>™</sup>  
Health



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## **Anyone can develop a problem with painkillers.**

In NYC in 2016, 1 out of 5 overdose deaths involved an opioid painkiller. Over the last decade, more than 1,700 New Yorkers have lost their lives due to these medications.

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## What are prescription painkillers?

Prescription painkillers, also known as opioid analgesics or opioid painkillers, are medications that are prescribed to reduce pain.

They may come in a pill form, in liquid form or in a patch. The following are examples of prescription painkillers:



### **Oxycodone**

(e.g. OxyContin®, Percodan®, Percocet®)



### **Hydrocodone**

(e.g. Vicodin®, Lortab®, Lorcet®)



### **Codeine**



### **Fentanyl**

## What are the risks?

Prescription painkillers can reduce pain, but they can be dangerous and have the same risks as illegal opioids, such as heroin.

Sometimes people who take painkillers can lose control over their use. This places them at risk for even more serious consequences such as addiction or overdose.

An overdose can cause a person to stop breathing and may lead to death. Mixing painkillers with alcohol or other prescribed or non-prescribed drugs increases the risk of overdose and death.

# How to Reduce Your Risk

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## Take your medication as prescribed.

- ▶ **Don't buy or share prescription painkillers that are not prescribed to you.** Taking drugs without a prescription or sharing prescriptions with someone else can be dangerous.
- ▶ **Never buy prescription medicines from people who are not licensed pharmacists or from stores – including online stores – that are not authorized to sell them.** The medicine could be fake, or mixed with other dangerous drugs or chemicals.
- ▶ **Never take more than prescribed.** It can be unsafe. If your medication is not relieving your pain, ask your doctor if another treatment may work better for you.
- ▶ **Ask your doctor to prescribe painkillers at the lowest effective dose, for the shortest amount of time** to reduce your risk of developing a problem.

## Store and dispose of your medications safely.

- ▶ **Keep the medications in their original labeled containers.**
- ▶ **Store medications safely** and out of sight and reach of children.
- ▶ **Dispose of prescription painkillers that you are no longer using.** Having them in your home increases the risk that someone else might take them. Mix them with cat litter or coffee grounds and throw them in the trash, or ask your local pharmacy if they have a medication disposal box.

## Know the signs of an opioid use disorder.

- ▶ **Craving:** You have a very strong urge to take painkillers.
- ▶ **Tolerance:** You need more to get the same effect.
- ▶ **Withdrawal:** You feel sick when you stop taking them.
- ▶ **Drowsiness and Confusion:** You feel sleepy and can't do anything besides take your medicine, or you forget all or part of what happens while you were taking it.
- ▶ **Preoccupation:** You think a lot about getting and taking painkillers, to the point of neglecting your family, work, friends or school.
- ▶ **Mixing Drugs:** You find yourself taking more than one drug or mixing your medication with alcohol to feel okay.

# Prevent death from overdose.

- ▶ **Prevent opioid overdose deaths.** Overdoses can be reversed with naloxone. Naloxone is a medication that is available for free from overdose prevention programs. You can also buy it at participating pharmacies in New York City.
- ▶ **Sign up for a free training** on how to recognize when someone is overdosing on opioids, and how to give naloxone. To find out where to get naloxone training, visit [nyc.gov/health](https://nyc.gov/health) and search **find naloxone**.
- ▶ **Avoid using alone.** If you overdose, you want someone around to help.
- ▶ **Avoid mixing.** Most overdoses happen when heroin or painkillers are mixed with other drugs like benzos, fentanyl and alcohol.
- ▶ **Know the signs of overdose.** These include little-to-no breathing, blue lips or skin color and passing out.
- ▶ **If you see someone who you think is overdosing, call 911 and give them naloxone if you have it.** The law protects you from prosecution and civil liability under certain circumstances. For more information, visit [health.ny.gov](https://health.ny.gov) and search **good samaritan law**.



## Watch out for fentanyl.

Fentanyl is a dangerous opioid that's showing up in heroin, cocaine, street pills marked as Xanax® and other drugs. Fentanyl that is manufactured illegally has been involved in more overdose deaths than ever before. Anyone using drugs, even casually, is at risk.

If you or someone you know uses drugs, follow the above tips to prevent death from overdose.

### Get help if you think you are at risk.

- ▶ If you are having problems with painkillers, other drugs or alcohol, help is available. Talk to your doctor or call **1-888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355)** if your use of drugs or alcohol is affecting your health, work or relationships.
- ▶ Treatment for substance use problems is available in NYC.
- ▶ Buprenorphine and methadone are effective medications for treating opioid use disorders. They block the effects of heroin and other painkillers, alleviate withdrawal symptoms and reduce cravings. Medicaid, Medicare and most other insurance plans cover both medications.
- ▶ To find buprenorphine, methadone and other substance use services, visit **[nyc.gov/health](https://www.nyc.gov/health)** and search **drug and alcohol use**.

