

# When Pain Medications Become a Problem



Opioid pain medications are a special class of medications that act on receptors in the brain to relieve moderate to severe pain. Some opioid pain medications include hydrocodone (e.g. Vicodin), oxycodone (e.g. OxyContin, Percocet), morphine (e.g. Kadian, Avinza), and codeine. Opioids can produce sleepiness, euphoria, nausea, constipation, and if taken at a sufficient dose, depressed respiration (NIDA, 2014).

**Risk of Overdose:** Because opioid medications can suppress breathing, there is a risk of overdose. Individuals at increased risk of overdose include those who are:

- 1) Mixing opioids with other medications, illicit drugs, and/or alcohol;
- 2) Taking more medication than prescribed;
- 3) Taking opioid medication over a long time period;
- 4) Using opioids without doctor supervision; and those who
- 5) Have a history of chemical addiction.

Signs of overdose include:

- Cold, clammy skin
- Slow, loud breathing or no breathing
- Low blood pressure
- Sleepiness, stupor, or coma
- Small, constricted or "pinpoint" pupils

**If you suspect someone of having overdosed, you need to call 9-1-1 immediately.**

**Risk of Addiction:** Like heroin, opioid prescription medications have the potential to become addictive. Many people who use opioid medications do not become addicted but anyone can become addicted to these medications.

Signs of addiction include:

- Changes in personality, attitudes, and/or behavior
- Neglecting other activities / poor performance at school or work
- Relationship problems with family members, friends, and/or employers
- Chronic dishonesty and secretive behavior
- Changes in appearance - weight loss and/or neglected personal hygiene

**If you suspect someone of having an addiction, seek help from a behavioral health professional. For more information: <http://dmh.mo.gov/ada/help.html>**



**Missouri Department of Mental Health  
Division of Behavioral Health**

[www.dmh.mo.gov](http://www.dmh.mo.gov)

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