

Myths About Pain Medications



There are different types of pain medications that act to relieve pain through different mechanisms. Opioid pain relievers act on receptors in the brain. In addition to reducing pain, they produce drowsiness, euphoria, and depressed respiration. When taken at high doses or mixed with alcohol or other drugs, their use can become life-threatening. In Missouri, an estimated 235,000 individuals age 12 or older have misused pain medications in the past year (SAMHSA, 2012).

Myth: *Prescription drugs are safer than illegal drugs like heroin.*

Fact: Some pain medications are chemically very similar to heroin. These medications require a prescription because their use and potential side effects need to be monitored by a doctor.

Myth: *You cannot become addicted to a prescription drug.*

Fact: Certain prescription drugs including opioid painkillers act on the central nervous system and can become addictive. Taking these medications at an increased dose or for a period longer than medically necessary increases the risk of addiction.

Myth: *It is OK for me to share my prescription with a friend.*

Fact: It can be a felony to share medications including opioid painkillers with someone else. Because people react to medications differently, you could also be putting that person's health and/or life at risk.

Myth: *If I am in pain, it is OK to take more pills than indicated by my doctor.*

Fact: Taking medications in a way other than instructed by the doctor can increase the risk of complications including addiction and overdose.

Myth: *Opioid medications are the only way to treat pain.*

Fact: Other pain medications such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs may be as effective in treating pain with fewer side effects. Talk to your doctor about your options.



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