

Opioid Use Disorder: How Does It Occur and Who's at Risk?

Description

How dangerous is opioid use? Well, we've followed statistics on the opioid epidemic for decades, but instead of getting better, the numbers show it's actually significantly worse.

The change in drug overdose fatalities [from 1999 to 2021](#) has increased more than six times. In 2021, almost 107,000 people died from an overdose, and more than 75% of those deaths were related to opioid use.

If you or someone you love is using opioids, even if they're prescription like Vicodin or Oxycodone, you or they are at risk of an addiction and overdose. And if you even suspect there may be a reliance on them, look for an [opiate addiction treatment in Thousand Oaks](#) or nearest you.

Even short term opioid use is dangerous. Educating yourself on how an opioid use disorder occurs and who is at risk may just save your life.

What is Opioid Use Disorder?

Anyone who takes opioids can develop an addiction to them called opioid use disorder. However, just because you take a prescription painkiller after a surgery or for an occasional acute pain relief, this doesn't mean you're an addict.

The problem is that it's impossible to determine whether a short course of this medication will make you dependent on it or not. There's no hard and fast rule that says these type of people are more likely to become addicted. With opioids, it could be anyone.

Misusing these drugs, whether legally or illegally, accounts for nearly 100 deaths in the US every day.

Why Are Opioids So Addictive?

Some substances, like alcohol or marijuana, can be addictive, but most people who use them socially don't become addicts. On the other hand, the odds of becoming dependent on opioids skyrockets with every use.

What's the difference between these and other drugs? Opioids trigger the reward center in your brain, releasing powerful hits of endorphins like dopamine that convince you that you feel amazing. This effect has a co-consequence of taking away your feelings of pain and depression, but the results don't last long.

If they have to choose between taking an opioid and being in constant, life-altering pain or sadness, it's easy to see why so many people choose the opioid.

Yet, there's a catch. Like with any drug, your body eventually builds up a tolerance to opioids. The dosage that once put you on top of the world when you first started using barely makes a dent in your pain soon after. When you build up this numbing effect to the drug, you need to take more and more to get the desired results. If you don't, you may have withdrawal symptoms like increased pain, anxiety, and fatigue.

Furthermore, this increased intake comes with risks, including the potential for overdose. For this reason, it can be important to have access to [overdose reversal medication Naloxone](#), for example, which can be useful for saving lives in emergency situations. The availability of such medications can reduce the risk of dangers associated with overdosing.

Who is At Risk?

A huge red flag that you have opioid use disorder is that you need more to get the results you want. But there are other risk factors that you should be aware of that make you more likely to become addicted to opioids, such as:

- Taking opioids in any form other than which you were prescribed them,
- Taking too much medicine in a short time,
- Taking more than the prescribed dose,
- Using opioids for more than a few days,
- Taking opioids young, particularly as a teen or in the early 20s,
- Having a history of substance misuse,
- Having a stressful environment at home or at work,
- Taking part in other risky behaviors
- Using tobacco regularly.

Although all of these factors can apply to any gender, women tend to have more long-term pain, being prescribed opioid medications in high doses for long periods.

To prevent this disorder, if you must use opioids, limit your use to no longer than three days to manage your pain after a broken bone or surgery. Ask for the lowest possible dose, and tell your doctor not to agree with you if you ask for a higher dose or a refill. Alternatively, ask if any other medication is available that would provide similar effects without the extreme risk of addiction.

If it's too late and you think you or someone you know has an opioid use disorder, don't wait. Contact an opioid treatment center today to find out how you can get help.

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