



Franklin County Task Force

About Opioids

Learn more about opioids. You'll be better prepared to catch the signs of abuse — and prevent addiction and overdose in your community.

[What are opioids?](#)

When we talk about opioids, we mean heroin and prescription painkillers, like OxyContin, Percocet, or Vicodin. Opioids are used to reduce pain. They are also very addictive.

Here's a list of common opioid drugs, also called narcotics:

- Codeine
- Fentanyl (Actiq, Duragesic, Fentora)
- Hydrocodone (Lorcet, Lortab, Norco, Vicodin)
- Hydromorphone (Dilaudid, Exalgo)
- Meperidine (Demerol)
- Methadone (Dolophine, Methadose)
- Morphine (Avinza, Kadian, MS Contin, Ora-Morph SR)
- Oxycodone (OxyContin, Oxyfast, Percocet, Roxicodone)
- Oxycodone and naloxone (Targiniq ER)

Heroin is a type of opioid — it comes from morphine. It's usually white or brown powder (it can also be dark tar) that people inject ("shoot up"), snort, or smoke.

Street names for heroin include:

- Smack
- H
- Skag
- Junk

Some names refer to where the heroin was made, like "Mexican Black Tar." Others are more like brand names, such as "Brainstorm."

What are the risks of opioid misuse?

Opioids are powerful and addictive. Your brain wants more opioids over time, even if you think it's a bad idea. The longer you use opioids, the less they seem to work. It's easy to feel like you should take more: Your body wants more of the drug to get the same level of pain relief. For some people, this becomes an addiction.

Someone addicted to opioids looks a lot like everyone else. A person with an addiction might be an honor-roll soccer player who started out with a prescription for opioids after knee surgery. Or it might be an office manager with chronic low back pain. Opioid addiction can happen to anyone, including the people you love the most. Don't overlook the signs of abuse. If you think someone might be misusing opioids, [talk to them right away](#).

It's easy to overdose on opioids. One dose could kill you, even if it's the exact same dose you took yesterday. Opioids slow your breathing. If you take too much, your breathing will stop and you can die. If you think someone is overdosing, [you can give them Narcan](#), a drug that helps the person wake up.

Your body gets attached to opioids when you use them regularly or for a long time. This is called physical dependence. Your body doesn't feel good without the drug. If you try to stop, you'll go through intense withdrawal. Many people who are dependent on opioids will become addicted.

People switch to heroin because it's cheaper. Heroin often costs less and is easier to get than prescription opioids. Just like prescription opioids, heroin is very addictive and people usually need medical treatment to recover.

4 out of 5 cases of heroin addiction start with prescription medicines.

What are the signs of opioid misuse?

Looking at someone who's misusing opioids, you may notice:

- Small or "pinpoint" pupils
- Track marks on arms (scars or bruises from using needles)
- Itches and scratches on the skin
- An overall unhealthy look

You also might notice health problems linked to opioid misuse. For example:

- Weight loss
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- Constipation (having trouble pooping)
- In women, not getting a period
- Depression

You may also see changes in their behavior. For example, a person misusing opioids may:

- "Nod off" to sleep
- Start using laxatives
- Lose friends they've had for a long time
- Have problems in school or at work
- Lose interest in activities
- Spend more time away from home
- Make frequent, secret phone calls
- Get in trouble with the police

Looking around their home, you may notice:

- Missing money, credit cards, and/or valuables
- Pawn slips
- Purchases returned for refunds
- Extra plastic Ziploc bags
- Bottles of vinegar and bleach and cotton balls
- Aluminum foil or chewing gum wrappers with burn marks
- Spoons with burn marks (if you share a home, you may also notice that spoons go missing)

What do these household items have to do with opioid abuse? Having them can be a sign that a person is getting high. They might use vinegar or bleach to clean needles. They might use aluminum foil, gum wrappers, or spoons to smoke heroin. Finding lots of extra plastic bags can be a sign that someone is buying or selling drugs.

Many people who are addicted to opioids steal money or valuable items (to sell or pawn) so they can buy more drugs. If someone you love is taking money from you or you notice things missing from your home, don't ignore it. It might be a sign of opioid misuse.

When people who are dependent on opioids stop taking them suddenly, they may have different symptoms as their body reacts. This is called withdrawal. Symptoms of opioid withdrawal include:

- Diarrhea (watery poop)
- Sweating
- Dilated (very big) pupils
- Irritability (moodiness)
- Anxiety (feeling worried or nervous)
- Trouble sleeping
- Talking about craving medicines or drugs
- Complaining about pain — especially stomach cramps, muscle aches, and bone pain

[What are opioids?](#)

[What are the risks of opioid misuse?](#)

[What are the signs of opioid misuse?](#)

[Get Help](#)

Learn more about opioids. You'll be better prepared to catch the signs of abuse — and prevent addiction and overdose in your community.

Misuse Prevention

Opioid misuse is a big problem, but there's a lot you can do to help your family and friends stay addiction free. Together, we can start to heal our community — and we're so glad you want to help.

[Keep track of your medications.](#)

If you have a prescription for opioids or other drugs, make sure that you're the only person who's using them. You can:

Lock up all prescription drugs. Use a safe or a lockbox that's bolted to something that cannot be moved. You need to be the only person who can get into it.

- Keep an eye on how many pills you have. Use a log or a calendar to track the number of pills you should have left.
- Never share a prescription medication. Sharing medication isn't safe, even if you're just trying to help a loved one feel better. Want to know how most people start using opioids? 70% of the time, it's because a friend or family member gave them a pill. If your loved one is in pain, send them to the doctor instead.

Before you get a prescription for powerful painkillers from your doctor, remember that you have other options. Talk to your doctor about non-medication treatments that might help with pain.

[Get rid of leftover medications safely.](#)

If you're done with a prescription and still have some pills left, don't keep them around the house.

One easy way to get rid of them is to bring them to a MedReturn Drug Collection Box. They're at police stations in:

- [Athol](#)
- [Deerfield](#)
- [Erving](#)
- [Greenfield](#)
- [Montague](#)
- [Orange](#)
- [Sunderland](#)

If you can't get to a drug collection box, you can still throw out old medications safely. Here's how to do it:

- Use a permanent marker to black out any personal information on the bottle.
- Take out the pills and mix them with something you can't eat — like cat litter or coffee — so pets and kids won't accidentally get them.
- Put the mix in a sealable bag or empty container. That way the mixture won't leak out — and anyone who looks through your trash probably won't notice them.
- Throw the pill mix and empty bottle in the trash. Don't flush pills — they're not good for our water supply.

Learn more about safeguarding the medicine in your home from the [Medicine Abuse Project](#).

Protect your children.

Make sure your kids know about risks of using substances like alcohol, illegal drugs, and medicine that is not prescribed to them.

Abusing substances is especially harmful to children and teens, since their brains are still developing (and will keep developing until age 25). The earlier a young person starts using drugs or alcohol, the more likely they are to develop addiction as they get older.

However, you can make a difference. Kids who learn about the risks of substance use from their parents are less likely to use. Start talking and keep talking. You can also:

- Set clear rules about substance use in your home. Work together to come up with fair consequences for breaking the rules — and stick to them.
- Stay involved in your children's lives. Go to their after-school activities. Eat dinner together. Meet their teachers at school. When your kids aren't home, make sure you always know where they are and who they're with.
- Know the signs of substance use and mental health issues. If you suspect your child is struggling with substance use, anxiety, or depression, get help.

Be a good role model.

Young people who see their parents drunk, using drugs, or misusing medicine are at an increased risk for developing substance abuse problems themselves.

So don't use substances to manage your own stress. Show your kids healthier ways to cope.

Try exercising, doing yoga or meditating, talking to a friend or therapist, or just doing something fun — like playing a game or watching a funny movie.

Get more tips and information from the [Parent Toolkit at the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids](#).

Overdose Prevention

If a friend or loved one were having an overdose, would you be able to tell? Would you know how to help? Learn more on this page. It could help you save someone's life.

[Learn the signs of an overdose.](#)

If a person has an overdose, it usually happens about 1 to 3 hours after they used a drug. Signs include:

- Heavy nodding — looking like they're losing consciousness (falling asleep)
- Not waking up when you yell their name or firmly rub the middle of their chest
- Blue lips or blue fingertips
- Slow breathing (less than 1 breath every 5 seconds) or no breathing
- Very limp body and very pale face
- Choking sounds or a gurgling, snoring noise

Source: [Prescribe to Prevent](#)

If a friend or loved one were having an overdose, would you be able to tell? Would you know how to help? Learn more on this page. It could help you save someone's life.

[Learn the signs of an overdose.](#)

[Know what to do and how to help.](#)

If you think someone is having an overdose, act fast.

- Try to wake the person up. Keep yelling their name and rubbing the middle of their chest hard.
- Call 911 right away. Give the address and say if the person is not breathing. You will not get in trouble with the police for helping.
- Put the person on their side. This will help stop them from choking
- Stay until the ambulance arrives if you can. Staying is best. If you have to go, leave the door open.

If the person has stopped breathing, start rescue breathing.

- Make sure nothing is in the person's mouth.
- Tilt their head back, lift the chin, and pinch the nose shut.
- Give 1 slow breath every 5 seconds until they start breathing

If you have it, give the person Narcan — a medicine that can stop an overdose from opioids. It will help wake them up and keep them breathing.

If you have nasal Narcan (a nose spray):

- Screw the parts together
- Use a full vial (container)

- Spray half in each nostril

If you have injectable Narcan (a shot):

- Give the person the shot (1cc/ml) in a large muscle, like their upper arm or upper leg

You can get Narcan at the pharmacy. Call first to be sure they carry it — if they don't, ask them to stock it. People who use opioids can carry Narcan the same way people with allergies carry an EpiPen. Narcan is not addictive.

Narcan only works with opioids. It won't help with overdoses from other drugs like benzodiazepines (Xanax, Klonopin, Valium), methamphetamines (speed, crystal meth), cocaine, bath salts, or alcohol.

Get Help

- [Treatment and Recovery Resources](#)
- [Tips for Intervening with a Loved One](#)

Get Involved

- [About Us](#)
- [Resources for Healthcare Providers](#)
- [Upcoming Events](#)
- [Support Us](#)

Definitions:

Opiates are drugs derived from opium. At one time "opioids" referred to synthetic opiates only (drugs created to emulate opium, however different chemically). Now the term Opioid is used for the entire family of opiates including natural, synthetic and semi-synthetic. Medical professionals use the word opioid to refer to most opioids, and opiate for a specific non-synthetic opioid; however, many only use "opioid". Consistent with the newest definition, this website uses "opioid" to refer to all opioids and opiates.

An opioid is any agent that binds to opioid receptors (protein molecules located on the membranes of some nerve cells) found principally in the central nervous system and gastrointestinal tract, and elicits a response. There are four broad classes of opioids:

Consistent with the newest definition, this website uses "opioid" to refer to all opioids and opiates.

- Endogenous opioid, naturally produced in the body, endorphins
- Opium alkaloids, such as morphine and codeine
- Semi-synthetic opioids such as heroin, oxycodone, and Buprenorphine
- Fully synthetic opioids, such as methadone, that have structures unrelated to the opium alkaloids

Drug dependence means that a person needs a drug to function normally. Abruptly stopping the drug leads to withdrawal symptoms.

Drug addiction is the compulsive use of a substance, despite its negative or dangerous effects.

A person may have a physical dependence on a substance without having an addiction. For example, certain blood pressure medications do not cause addiction but they can cause physical dependence. Other drugs, such as cocaine, cause addiction without leading to physical dependence.

Tolerance to a drug (needing a higher dose to attain the same effect) is usually part of addiction.

Overdose: When a drug is swallowed, inhaled, injected, or absorbed through the skin in excessive amounts and injures the body. Overdoses are either intentional or unintentional. If the person taking or giving a substance did not mean to hurt themselves or others, then it is unintentional.

Misuse: The use of prescription drugs in a manner other than as directed.

Abuse: Continued use of illicit or prescription drugs despite problems from drug use with relationships, work, school, health, or safety. People with substance abuse often experience loss of control and take drugs in larger amounts or for longer than they intended.

Naloxone: A prescription drug that can reverse an opioid or heroin overdose if administered in time.