

Be Well Aware – Health Article



Safe Use of Opioids

Opioid abuse and mis-use has been a hot topic in the media. The high risk of developing unhealthy dependencies on these types of medications, combined with harmful outcomes from mis-use are of great concern. If you or a loved one are working with a doctor on a pain treatment or management plan involving the use of opioid medication, it is critical to discuss your unique risk factors and have a clear plan in place for safety BEFORE you start using the medication.

Putting in precautionary measures is key to making sure the use does not become the highly addictive habit as it has for so many around the world. As stated in by the Mayo Clinic in an article on safe use of opioids, “After just five days of prescription opioid use, the likelihood that you’ll develop long-term dependence on these drugs rises steeply – increasing your risk of an overdose.”

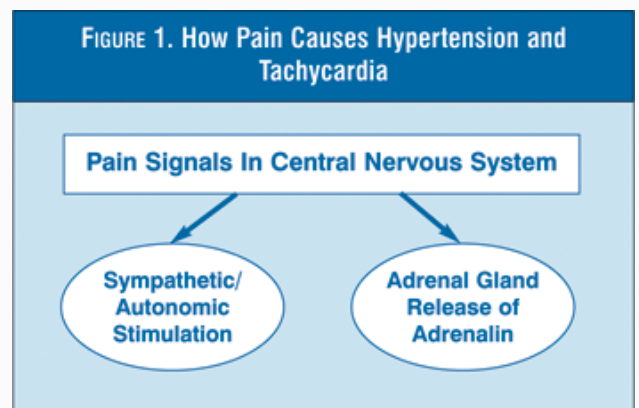
A few things to consider prior to starting the use of opioids should include your medical history, family history and any history of substance abuse. Being honest with yourself and your physician about any abuse in your history, alcohol use and illegal substances can be the few factors you need to keep yourself safe.

Your doctor should be following the guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and should prescribe the lowest

dose for the shortest time period possible, when dealing with or treating pain. In addition to setting a realistic treatment goal with your physician you should also sign an agreement with your physician and schedule regular checkups. If you are experiencing any side effects, such as constipation, nausea or mood changes you should report this directly to your physician or health care team. If a loved one is currently taking opioids you should look for any signs of trouble.

- Taking pain medication “just in case”, especially when no pain exists
- Borrowing medication from other people
- Taking more than the prescribed dose
- Mood changes

FIGURE 1. How Pain Causes Hypertension and Tachycardia



[Possible negative outcomes of opioid use](#)

There are a variety of possible cardiac problems associated with opioids; including bradycardia, which is a slow heart rate and can lead to poor exercise tolerance. You become fatigued more quickly, not allowing your body to get the full benefits of the exercises you are performing.

Vasodilation, or dilation of the blood vessels, is also a possible outcome of being on opioids, which can lead to a sudden drop in blood pressure. As you work out, your entire body needs to be supplied with blood and the nutrients in which it carries in order to keep performance up and with a sudden drop in blood pressure your body will struggle to provide you with what is needed. Other dangers associated with vasodilation include dizziness and possibly passing out due to an inadequate amount of blood reaching the brain. In addition to these possible cardiac problems, the biggest and most severe is cardiovascular death.

Opioid	Blood pressure	heart rate	PAD
Morphine	↓	↓ / -	↓ / 0
Buprenorphine	↓	↓ / -	-
Pentazocine	(↑)	(↑)	↑
Nalbuphine	-	↓	-
Meperidine	(↓)	↓ / - / ↑	-
Piritramid	(↓)	-	-
Fentanyl	↓	↓	-

[Safety precautions while on opioids](#)

Once you and your doctor have decided that opioids are right for your pain and you are looking to stay active, there are some steps you would want to take to help minimize the risk of injury while exercising.

- Substitute activities that require less exertion
- Choose activities that involve less impact
- Use exercise machines
- Reduce workout time
- Monitor changes in heart rate and blood pressure during and after exercise

[How to dispose of opioids](#)

Disposing of your unused opioids immediately after treatment is a big factor in making sure you are not tempted to use them again, and can save accidental ingestion by loved ones or pets. Do not give any unused medications to your friends and also do not just throw them away; as even one dose could be fatal if given to the wrong person. There may be some organizations that have an authorized take-back program to help dispose of any unused opioid. Check with local law enforcement or the DEA for take-back programs and locations. If this is not a program available to you then flushing any unused opioids should be considered, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). If you are unsure of which medication can be flushed, you should check on the [FDA's flush list](#).

References

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/prescription-drug-abuse/in-depth/how-to-use-opioids-safely/art-20360373>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/consumer-health/in-depth/opioids-and-exercise/art-20396866>

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/can-opioids-cause-heart-problems-4134144>