

GET THE FACTS ABOUT PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS

447 people in Delaware had a drug-related deaths in 2020. Many of those people had been prescribed opioids.

Almost **2 million** Americans abuse or are dependent on prescription opioids.

As many as **1 in 4** people who receive prescription opioids long-term for non-cancer pain in primary care settings struggles with addiction.

WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are drugs that block pain signals to the brain and have very serious side effects. **Commonly prescribed opioids include hydrocodone, oxycodone, codeine, morphine and fentanyl.** Heroin is also an opioid.

Opioids aren't made for long-term use; the more you use them, the more your body builds a tolerance. You'll have the same level of pain, but need more opioids — increasing your chances of overdose or addiction. Long-term use of opioids can be appropriate for some patients receiving active cancer treatment, palliative care, and/or end-of-life care.

HOW DO I TAKE OPIOIDS?

- Start low and go slow — your prescriber should give you the lowest dose for the shortest amount of time possible.
- Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed — otherwise, addiction or overdose becomes more likely.
- Do not share your prescription medications with anyone. It is both illegal and unsafe.
- Avoid taking opioids with alcohol. Mixing the two can increase your risk of overdose.
- Avoid mixing opioids with the following medications when possible (unless otherwise advised by your prescriber): sedatives or tranquilizers, including benzodiazepines (e.g., Xanax and Valium); muscle relaxants (e.g., Soma or Flexeril); sleeping pills or hypnotics (e.g., Ambien or Lunesta); and other prescription opioid pain relievers.
- There may be circumstances where prescribing opioids with these medications is necessary and acceptable. Also, your prescriber may use urine drug tests and check your prescription history to help make prescribing decisions that ensure your safety.
- Follow up regularly with your health care professional to monitor how the medication is working, side effects, or signs of opioid use disorder (like addiction).
- If you're taking opioids for an extended period of time, you should taper your usage — with the guidance of your health care professional — as your pain subsides, until you're off opioids completely. If you're taking high doses or long-term opioids, consider having naloxone on hand.



WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF OPIOIDS?

- Opioid medications are addictive.
- Overdosing on opioids can happen by accident.
- Opioids can cause significant side effects, including constipation, nausea, vomiting, dry mouth, sleepiness, dizziness, confusion, and increased sensitivity to pain.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES FOR PAIN MANAGEMENT?

- Rehabilitation services and physical therapy
- Therapy and relaxation techniques
- Exercise and strength training
- Non-opioid medications: acetaminophen, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs)

HOW SHOULD I STORE AND DISPOSE OF MY MEDICATIONS?

- Lock all medications up or put them out of the way of anyone, including children and pets, who might try to consume them by accident or on purpose.
- Safely dispose of any unused medications at one of 28 Delaware prescription medication drop boxes. For a complete list of locations, visit [HelpsHereDE.com](https://www.delaware.gov/helpshere).

Find an online guide to prevention, treatment, and recovery resources at [HelpsHereDE.com](https://www.delaware.gov/helpshere).



If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction, call the Delaware Hope Line at

1-833-9-HOPEDE
(833-946-7333)

Free counseling, coaching, support, and links to services.

