Opioid addiction and dependence

Physical reliance on opioids, a substance found in certain prescription pain medications and illegal drugs like heroin.

Common
More than 200,000 US cases per year

- Treatable by a medical professional
- Usually self-diagnosable

Opioids are prescribed to treat acute pain. With prolonged use, pain-relieving effects lessen and pain can become worse. In addition, the body can develop dependence. Opioid dependence causes withdrawal symptoms, which makes it difficult to stop taking them. Addiction occurs when dependence interferes with daily life.

Symptoms of addiction include uncontrollable cravings and inability to control opioid use even though it's having negative effects on personal relationships or finances.

Treatment varies but may include discontinuing the drug. Medications such as methadone can help alleviate the symptoms of withdrawal and cravings. Pairing medication with inpatient or support programs generally has the most success.

Ages affected

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-13
- 19-40
- 41-60
- 60+

Symptoms

Usually self-diagnosable

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People may experience:

Whole body: craving or sweating

Mood: euphoria or general discontent

Also common: physical substance dependence, chronic constipation, small pupils, nausea, reduced sex drive, sensitivity to pain, shallow breathing, or slurred speech
Treatments

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Medical procedure

Drug detoxification: Medical management of the serious withdrawal symptoms that occur when a person addicted to drugs stops using them. Often requires prescription medications.

Therapies

Gradual discontinuation of opioids

Counseling: Professional advice and support that help people solve problems, make decisions, and change their behavior.

Opioid replacement therapy

Medications

Narcotic: Relieves pain, dulls the senses, and causes drowsiness. May become addictive.
- Buprenorphine (Buprenex, Butrans, Probuphine, and Belbuca)
- Methadone (Methadose, Diskets, Dolophine, and Methadone Intensol)
- Buprenorphine / Naloxone (Suboxone, Zubsolv, and Bunavail)

Sedative: Causes drowsiness, calmness, and dulled senses. Some types may become addictive.
- Clonidine (Catapres, Kapvay, Catapres-TTS-1, Catapres-TTS-2, and Catapres-TTS-3)

Specialists

Pain management: Eases suffering and improves quality of life for those in pain.

Psychiatrist: Treats mental disorders primarily with medications.

Primary care provider (PCP): Prevents, diagnoses, and treats diseases.

Consult a doctor for medical advice

Note: The information you see describes what usually happens with a medical condition, but doesn't apply to everyone. This information isn't medical advice, so make sure to contact a healthcare provider if you have a medical problem. If you think you may have a medical emergency, call your doctor or an emergency number immediately.

Sources: Mayo Clinic and others. Learn more