

Opioid Overdose

What are opioids?

Opioids bind to specific receptors in the brain that reduce the transmission of pain signals throughout the body. Opioids include: heroin, prescription pain medications like: hydrocodone (Vicodin), hydromorphone (Dilaudid), meperidine (Demerol), morphine (MS Contin), oxycodone (Percocet), codeine, fentanyl, methadone.

What causes overdose?

When there is too much opioid in the body, a person can lose consciousness and stop breathing – this is an overdose. An opioid overdose can happen suddenly or come on slowly over a few hours. Without oxygen, a person can die.

Risks for an opioid overdose include:

- **Using opioids again after your tolerance has dropped** (e.g., like after being in treatment, a hospital, or jail). After a break from opioids, the body can't handle as much as it did before.
- **Taking prescription pain medication more often or in higher doses.**
- **Using heroin or pills bought on the street.** Heroin and street pills often contain other substances that can be dangerously toxic.
- **Using opioids with alcohol or other drugs** including sleeping pills, benzodiazepines ("benzos" like Valium and Xanax), cocaine and methamphetamine.
- Any **current or chronic illness** that weakens the heart or makes it harder to breathe.
- **Using opioids alone.** You are more likely to die from an overdose if no one is there to help.
- **Previous overdose.** A person who has overdosed before is more likely to overdose again.

What to do in an opioid overdose?

Minutes count in an opioid overdose. If you think someone has overdosed, follow these steps:

1. Check for signs of overdose:

- Won't wake up. Try rubbing your knuckles hard on their sternum.
- Slow or no breathing
- Pale, ashy, cool skin
- Blue lips or fingernails

2. Call 911. Tell the dispatcher where you are and that someone is not breathing or is unconscious. Stay with the person until first responders arrive.

Please Stay until help arrives.

3. If the person wakes up and starts breathing, stay with them. Encourage them to get follow-up medical care.

Encourage the person to be **taken to a clinic or emergency room** where health care staff can further help them.

For more information visit stopoverdose.org