

Substance Abuse – Opioids and teens.

Learn the symptoms of opioid use and how you can help prevent opioid addiction in your home

If you watch the news at all, you've likely heard about the opioid drug epidemic. Parents may be surprised to learn teens are also using these drugs.

What are opioids?

Opioids are given by a doctor to treat severe pain. A doctor may order them for short period of time after surgery, a broken bone, or a sickle cell crisis. If pain is related to a disease like cancer, opioids may be ordered for a longer period.

Opioids are highly addictive. They are safe only when taken for a short period of time following the directions on the label. Examples of opioids include:

- OxyContin
- Vicodin
- Percocet
- Percodan
- Demerol
- Duragesic (Fentanyl)
- Methadone
- Heroin

Opioids can cause a feeling of joy, which teen brains may find appealing. Teens may use them to help relieve stress or anxiety, to see what it feels like or because of peer pressure.

How to prevent teenage opioid addiction and substance abuse

David Atkinson, M.D., Medical Director of the Teen Recovery Program at Children's HealthSM says, "For parents, the best thing they can do to make substance use less likely is to communicate clear expectations to their children. When parents say, 'I don't want you using drugs,' that's more likely to help than to avoid the topic all together."

As a parent, if you've been given an opioid for pain, take it as directed and only when you are in pain. Then, throw the rest away after the date on the bottle or when you no longer need them for pain. Ask your doctor or the pharmacists how best to get rid of unused medications.

Risk factors for opioid addiction

You are the best influence on your child's behavior and attitude towards drugs. Factors that may encourage teens to use opioids include:

- Availability and easy access to them
- How much you keep them in a safe place and notice how much is in the bottle
- Whether your teen thinks it will hurt them

Symptoms of opioid use

Many teens go through changes in their physical and mental health as they go through puberty in their teen years. However, severe mood swings that switch between joy and sleepiness could be a sign of opioid use. Some opioids can be injected, so look for bumps or needle marks or notice if your teen is trying to cover these up. Other symptoms of opioid use include:

- Very small pupils (the black middle part of your eyes)
- Slowed breathing
- Nodding off
- Constant runny nose
- Changes in hygiene and sleeping habits

Those who do use these drugs go into withdrawal if they do not have a steady supply. Opioid withdrawal symptoms include:

- Diarrhea – loose, runny poop
- Being irritable, or angry more than normal
- Sweating
- Stomach cramps

We encourage parents to watch for other signs of possible opioid use like money missing from the home or painkillers missing.

Treatment for opioid addiction

When teens use drugs, they may develop problems that need serious medical treatment. Treatment may include staying in the hospital for a while, going to programs outside of the hospital while staying home, and programs for teens with both emotional and drug use problems.

Treatment programs outside of the hospital include:

- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Medicine supported recovery for opioid and alcohol use
- Drug testing
- Parent help and family support

It may be hard for you to know which treatment is best for your teen. Talk with your teens' doctor or ask them to suggest a child psychiatrist or therapist. This is an expert who can help explain options and guide you in making the best choice for your teen.