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# Talking about opioid dependence

This may be a confusing or frustrating time in your life.

**Talking with your healthcare provider can help.**

**O**pioids are substances that help relieve pain. Opioids, also known as narcotics, may be illegal or prescription. Healthcare providers often prescribe opioids to help treat pain from dental procedures, injuries, surgeries, or conditions such as cancer. There are many different kinds of prescription opioids such as hydrocodone (Vicodin<sup>®</sup>) or oxycodone (OxyContin<sup>®</sup>, Percocet<sup>®</sup>). Heroin is an opioid, but it is not legal and healthcare providers don't prescribe it.

If you think you may be dependent on opioids, or if you are experiencing a relapse, the decision to seek help is an important step toward regaining control of your life. To make sure that you're getting the care and support that's right for you, it's best to speak to your healthcare professional. Using the discussion guide below may help to get the conversation going.

## 1 Getting Started

**If you feel uncomfortable beginning the conversation, just remember that the more you share, the better help your healthcare provider can offer. While marijuana, cocaine, and sedatives like alcohol and Xanax<sup>®</sup> are not opioids, it is important for your healthcare provider to know about their use as well. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider as much as you can, including:**

- Your history of opioid use, including a list of all opioids currently being used (prescription and/or illegal) and when you first started taking opioids
- How you got the opioids—from one healthcare provider, many, or sources other than a pharmacy such as mail order companies or off the street
- If you've ever taken opioids in a different form other than as prescribed, such as injecting with a needle or crushing the tablets to snort
- Whether you've ever taken any drugs that were not prescribed by a healthcare professional
- If you take opioids to help you sleep or when you are anxious or sad
- If you've ever tried to stop taking opioids and couldn't, or felt withdrawal symptoms (sweating, anxiety, runny nose, muscle aches, difficulty sleeping, etc) after you stopped using opioids
- If any family members or friends have told you they think you are too dependent on your pain medication
- Any other personal details that may help your healthcare provider better understand

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# Open communication helps

You may feel uncomfortable at first.  
**Trust your healthcare provider for the support and medication you need.**

## 2 Share All You Can

To best understand what you're going through, and to provide a treatment that's right for you, be ready to answer questions like these from your healthcare provider:

- What opioids are you currently taking (both prescription and/or illegal)?
- Have you ever injected or crushed and snorted your opioids?
- Have you been prescribed an opioid for a medical reason, such as pain relief for an injury?
- Do you take the medication as it has been prescribed? How much do you take and how often? For how long?
- Have you ever sought opioids from multiple healthcare providers or from sources other than a pharmacy such as mail order companies or off the street?
- Have you ever used somebody else's prescription opioids?
- Have you ever felt the need to cut down on the use of your opioids?
- How do you feel when you're not taking opioids?
- Have you ever felt sick (experienced withdrawal symptoms) when not using opioids?
- Have you found yourself avoiding social activities in order to use opioids, or spending more time trying to get opioids than on other activities?
- Do you have a history of depression, anxiety, or mental illness?
- How would you like your situation to be different?

## 3 Questions to Ask

Likewise, you may have a lot of questions to ask your healthcare provider during your visit, such as:

- What is opioid dependence?
- Can opioid dependence be treated?
- Does treatment include medication?
- For how long will I need to be treated?
- Will I experience any withdrawal symptoms?
- Will counseling and other support services be a part of my treatment or will I be referred?
- How soon can I start treatment?
- Is there a way to help lower the cost of my treatment?



**As you're talking with your healthcare provider, remember to be ready and willing to share as much as you can. Honest and open communication is needed when dealing with a chronic condition such as opioid dependence. You may feel uncomfortable at first, but you can trust your healthcare provider to provide you with the support and medication you need to help treat your opioid dependence.**