

Opioids (Physical Dependence and Addiction)



Overview

Opioids are a class of powerful drugs. They can block pain signals, and they can help control severe pain. But they can be dangerous. Over time, you may find it hard to stop taking opioids. And some people become addicted to the drugs.

How Opioids Affect You

Opioids mimic chemicals your body makes naturally. They help block pain, and they create good feelings in your brain. When you use an opioid for a short time, this can help you heal after an injury or surgery.

Physical Dependence

If you use an opioid daily for an extended period, you gradually need more and more of the drug to get the same benefits. The chemicals your own body makes are no longer enough, and your body begins to need the drug. When this happens, you have become physically dependent. Without the drug, you experience bad feelings we call "withdrawal symptoms." This can include feelings of restlessness and sleeplessness. You may feel pain in your muscles and bones. You may have diarrhea and vomiting. You may have cold flashes, which give you goose bumps. And, your legs may twitch. These symptoms can be very unpleasant.

Addiction

In some people, opioids can cause addiction. This is different from dependence. Addiction is a change in your brain that makes you crave the drug. You begin to use it uncontrollably. You use it even when you know it harms you and those around you. Opioid addiction is a dangerous disease. It can be deadly.

Safe Use

Opioids can be used safely, but they aren't a good choice for every patient. Talk to your doctor about physical dependence and addiction, and follow all of your doctor's recommendations. And if you are dependent on or addicted to opioids, get professional help as soon as possible.

