

Is painkiller addiction starting to take control?

This handbook can help you find out whether you or someone in your family/community may be dependent on opioids (painkillers). It also provides information on how and where to get the help you need.

- What 'opioid dependence' means
- Why it happens
- How it can affect your health

If you are worried about yourself or someone else, remember you are not alone. Help is available.

Speak to your doctor or health worker and take the first step to freedom from painkiller addiction.

Acknowledgment of country

Indivior acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their elders' past, present and emerging.

What is Opioid Dependence?

Opioids are painkillers and while they work well on fixing pain, they can also make you 'high' because they act on parts of the brain that make you feel good. This is why some people can't stop taking them and so become '**addicted**' or '**dependent**' on **opioids**.²

Examples of common opioid painkillers are:

- Codeine
- Tramadol
- Oxycodone
- Fentanyl
- Morphine

Some opioid painkillers may also include other regular medicines for treating pain, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Sometimes it may not be clear which painkillers contain opioids. If you are unsure, always double check with the doctor, health worker or the chemist.

Opioid painkiller addiction can affect anyone.³ It's important to remember that opioid painkiller addiction is an illness and not something that deserves blame – **it's no one's fault, and you are not alone.**

Am I addicted to opioid painkillers?

Signs of opioid painkiller addiction can be difficult. Have you (or a person you care about), felt or done any of the following in the past year:²

-  Unable to **stop or cut down** on opioid painkillers?
-  Used **more** of the opioid painkiller to get the same effect?
-  **Missed** work or school often?
-  **Lost interest** in doing regular activities?
-  Had relationship **breakdowns** with your family/community or partner?
-  Found it **hard** to sleep?
-  Became **angry** or bad-tempered often?
-  Had **problems** with sex?
-  Had an **upset** stomach e.g. gas, diarrhoea or vomit?

If you (or the person you care about), have had any of these feelings or experiences then you (or they) may be addicted to an opioid painkiller.

Opioid painkiller addiction is not intentional

No-one sets out to become addicted, but there are reasons why some people do become addicted.

Physical dependence

Physical dependence is a normal response to long-term use of opioid painkillers. Continued use can cause changes in the brain, leading to:⁴

 **Increased 'tolerance'**. Over time, your body gets used to the opioid so you need more to get the same level of 'high' as before.

 **Withdrawal symptoms**. If the dose is wearing off, you use a smaller amount or stop it altogether, you start to feel sick because your body has gotten used to having high amounts of the opioid.

 **Drug craving**. Opioids mess with the mind, making it hard to think straight or make safe decisions. That's all you may be able to focus on is getting your next 'fix'.

Genetics

- Addiction may run in your family: genetics may affect how your body reacts to opioids.⁴

Other conditions

- Anxiety or depression.

Other factors

- How your brain and body react to drugs can also affect whether you become addicted.⁴

Pathway to opioid painkiller addiction



Genetics or life events can lead to opioid painkiller addiction⁵



Positive response, e.g. relief of physical and/or emotional pain⁶

Not getting the same 'high' as before 



Using opioids more often

Long-term changes in the brain⁴ 



Have withdrawal symptoms when there is no or enough opioid⁴

Drug craving⁴ 



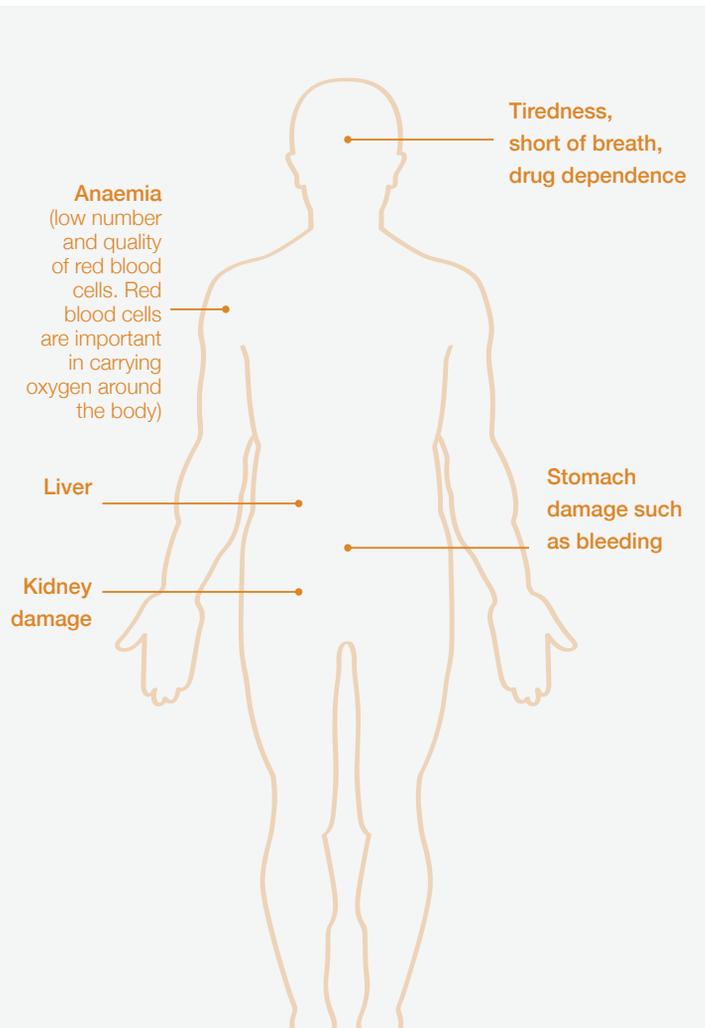
More opioids to stop withdrawal symptoms



The dangers of opioid painkiller addiction

Using opioid painkillers, with or without other regular medicines for treating pain such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, can affect your body in many ways. If they are used too often or taken in high amounts they can lead to breathing difficulties and even death.⁷

Below are some examples of how opioid painkiller addiction can lead to other health problems:



How is opioid painkiller addiction treated?

Treatment can be difficult.

Using opioids all the time can cause changes in your brain, which take time to sort out.

It is important to remember that opioid painkiller addiction is a long-term health problem that may require long-term treatment, just like asthma or diabetes treatment.

Treatment for long-term health problems involves making a treatment plan together with your doctor and or your health worker.

The treatment plan can include:

- Counselling
- Medication-assisted treatment
- In-patient or residential programs
- Detoxification

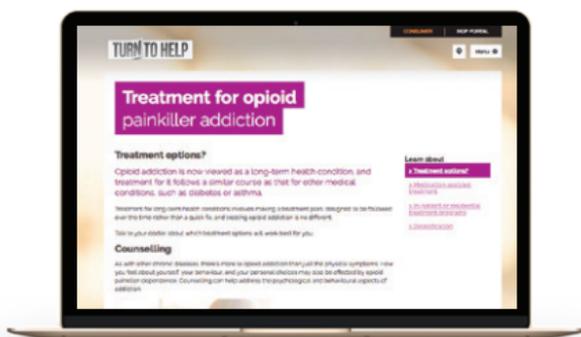
Your treatment plan will be designed to suit your needs so as to give you the greatest chance of success.

What can I expect from treatment?

TURN TO HELP

At www.turntohelp.com.au, you can learn more about treatment choices and what to expect before, during and after treatment.

You are not alone. Get the support you need to free yourself from opioid painkillers.



Treatment can help you to improve your health and change your life. If you think you or someone you know may have opioid painkiller addiction, it is important to speak to your doctor or health worker.

To find out more about opioid dependence visit www.turntohelp.com.au

This resource has been designed to provide you with:



Information on opioid painkiller addiction and ways to overcome it.



Videos of how people have overcome their opioid painkiller addiction.



A screening test to help find out if you or someone you know may be at risk of opioid painkiller addiction. This test is strictly private and results will not be saved or stored.



A locator tool to find doctors in your area who can help with opioid painkiller addiction.

Your doctor and health worker can help you become free of opioid painkiller addiction. Speak to them today.

References: 1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The non-medical use of prescription drugs: policy direction issues. New York, 2011. 2. Gowing L *et al.* National Guidelines for Medication-Assisted Treatment of Opioid Dependence. Australian Government National Drug Strategy; 2014. 3. The TEDS Report, 2010. 4. Cami J and Farré M. *N Engl J Med* 2003; 349:975–86. 5. Kreek MJ *et al.* *Nat Neurosci* 2005; 8:1450–57. 6. Kahan M *et al.* *Can Fam Physician* 2006; 52:1081–7. 7. WHO Information Sheet on Opioid Overdose. Available from http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/information-sheet/en/. Accessed August 2018. Indivior Pty Ltd, ABN 22 169 280 102. 78 Waterloo Road, Macquarie Park, NSW 2113. P-SBX-AU-00077. October 2019. IND0556.