

# Prescription Opioids and Heroin

## What are opioids?

- Opioids come in different forms, but have similar effects and can harm you.
- At high doses or when combined with other medications or alcohol, opioids can cause people to stop breathing.
- Opioids are prescribed for pain. Examples are hydrocodone, oxycodone, and fentanyl. Some prescription cough syrups also contain opioids.
- Heroin is an illegal opioid made from the opium poppy plant. Heroin is a white or brown powder or a black/dark brown sticky substance.
- Opioids are swallowed, injected, smoked, or snorted.

## Using opioids with other substances

- Opioids shouldn't be mixed with other drugs, especially depressants like alcohol, benzodiazepines, and sleeping medications. This greatly increases the risk of overdose and death.
- Mixing cocaine with heroin, called speedballing, also increases the risk of overdose.
- Heroin is sometimes mixed with fentanyl or carfentanil, very powerful opioids that cause overdose and death.

## Tips for quitting

### Getting started.

- Do not stop taking your opioid medicine suddenly. Lowering your dose too quickly can be dangerous.
- Be aware that withdrawal can occur. Physicians and addiction treatment programs can help with withdrawal.

### Know your options.

- *Treatment.* Treatment can include medications, counseling, or a combination. Medications can be provided by a treatment center (residential or outpatient) or provider office.
- *Medications.* Medications include methadone, buprenorphine (Suboxone), and naltrexone. They help manage cravings and withdrawal symptoms, and are used for long-term recovery.
- *Counseling.* Counseling options include cognitive behavioral therapy and motivational interviewing.
- *Peer support groups and recovery supports* are important to help people stay in recovery.

### Have naloxone in case of overdose.

- Naloxone is a life-saving tool for people who use opioids. Naloxone reverses opioid overdoses and keeps people from dying from an overdose. It may be available through your healthcare provider, pharmacy, or needle exchange program.

## Risks of opioid use

### Short Term

- Overdose means taking more of an opioid than your body can handle. Signs of an overdose are small pupils, slowed breathing, cold clammy skin, and unconsciousness. You can stop breathing and die.
- Use can impair learning and ability to drive.

### Long Term

- Tolerance means needing more opioids to get the same feeling, which can cause negative effects (see other side).
- Opioids are addictive. Not everyone becomes addicted, but some do. If you have bipolar disorder, anxiety, or problems with alcohol or drugs, talk to your healthcare provider.
- Withdrawal: Symptoms are aches, sweating, nausea, pain, vomiting, chills, and trouble sleeping.
- Pain: Long-term use can lead to an increase in pain.

## Opioids and pregnancy

- Use during pregnancy can lead to serious complications.
- But if you are pregnant, do not stop taking opioids without help from a qualified professional.

## Do not borrow or share opioids

- Taking opioids that are not prescribed to you is dangerous, and can cause or worsen health problems.
- Pills may look the same but could be different medicines, or have different amounts in each pill. Keep opioids locked up, out of reach of children and teenagers. Most misused medication was taken from someone with a prescription.
- Do not keep extra opioids; destroy them or return them to law enforcement.

## Important steps to take if using opioids

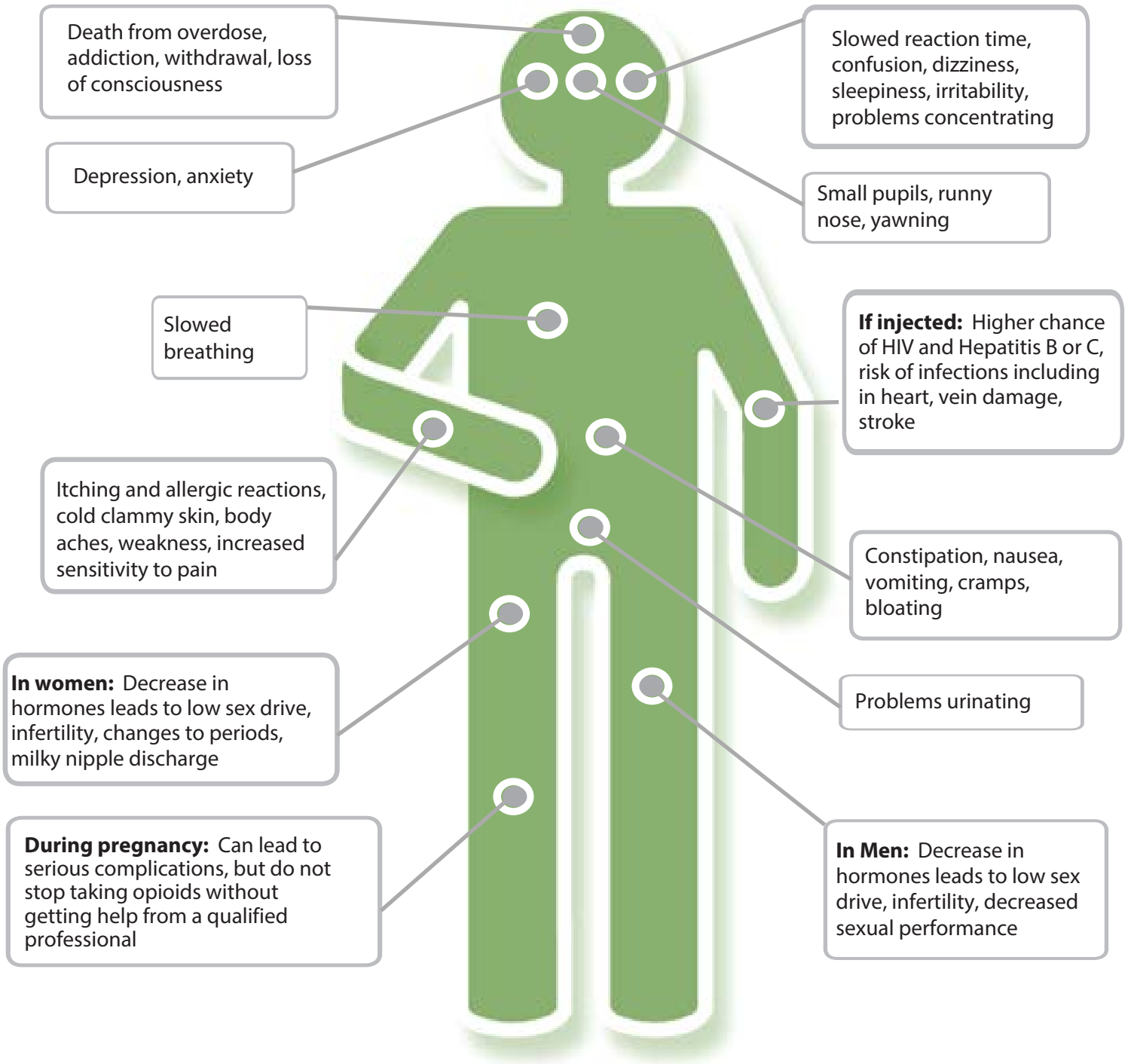
- Until you know how the medication affects you, do not use heavy machinery, operate a car, work in unprotected heights, or be responsible for a person who is unable to care for themselves.
- Tell someone you are taking opioids. They should call 911 if you have slowed breathing, cold, clammy skin, or become unconscious.
- Ask your provider if naloxone is something you should have.
- If you need help with pain management, or have health concerns, talk with your healthcare provider. There are other ways to treat pain.

## Helpful links

Information on preventing drug overdoses and reducing drug-related harm for opioid users can be found at: <http://harmreduction.org>. Also, see the [www.sbirt.care](http://www.sbirt.care) Resources page for links to more resources.

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## Effects on the Body



Mid-America (HHS Region 7)

**ATTC**

Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

