

Prescription Opioids Can Be Addictive and Dangerous

Opioids are a class of medications used to treat pain by working on the nervous system to reduce pain signals reaching the brain and release dopamine throughout the body. A few common prescription opioids are morphine, oxycodone, and hydrocodone. According to the Wisconsin ePDMP (enhanced Prescription Drug Monitoring Program), 15,841 opioid prescriptions were dispensed to Washburn County residents in 2017 – or about one prescription for each person living in the county.

You might be asking yourself, “but if these drugs are prescribed by my doctor, why should I be concerned?” The answer is simple: even when taken as prescribed, opioids can have a number of side effects, especially if used long-term. Short-term side effects may include constipation, nausea, vomiting, sleepiness, dizziness, confusion, depression, itching, sweating, and dry mouth. Long-term use of opioids can cause your body to develop a tolerance to the drug, requiring a higher and/or more frequent dosage to get the desired effects – even if you take the drug as directed.

Prescription opioid use can lead to substance use disorder, even when using opioids as prescribed by a doctor. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, “substance use disorder (SUD) is a medical illness ranging from mild to severe and from temporary to chronic.” An SUD develops when the drug changes the brain’s chemistry and causes problems in health and daily life. The most severe form of an SUD is addiction

Repeated use of opioids may also lead to a drug dependence. In this case, the brain has adapted to only function normally in the presence of the drug. Stopping the drug will cause severe withdrawal symptoms, such as muscle and bone pain, severe craving, diarrhea and vomiting, and sleep problems. It is possible to become dependent on opioids when using them for chronic pain management. To stop taking the drug, once dependent, may require medical support as it is a serious health condition.

To protect yourself from opioid addiction or overdose, talk to your doctor about alternative methods to manage your pain. It may also be beneficial to discuss with your doctor or pharmacist having Naloxone, a medication that can reverse an opioid overdose when administered right away, if you or a family member are taking high doses of opioids.

Being prescribed by a doctor does not take away the addictiveness of opioids. Work with your doctor or pharmacist to keep yourself safe if you are prescribed an opioid. You can also talk to your doctor about possible alternatives to prescription opioids. If you feel you are dependent on or addicted to opioids, treatment is possible. Talk to your medical provider for options.

More information is available at: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-opioids>
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/opioids/overview.htm>

Call the Washburn County Health Department for more information, 715-635-4400