

# Tapering opioid medications

Opioids may cause harmful side effects and dependence. They are also less able to relieve pain over time. Because of this, your healthcare provider may recommend you reduce the use of these medications. You can still treat your pain and improve function with other treatment options.

## I have been on this dose for years. Why do I need to change it now?



Lowering your opioid dose can help lessen your chance of side effects like constipation, sedation, low testosterone, and accidental overdose, among others. As you get older, your body will get more sensitive to these side effects. This makes the medication riskier over time.

## Do I have to stop opioids completely?

For some, tapering opioid medications down to zero may be the safest treatment option. For others, the goal may be to reduce doses to decrease the risk of side effects and harm.

Tapering medication over time does not necessarily mean going to zero



## What can I do to manage my pain if I am not taking an opioid?

Your healthcare provider can recommend many options, including non-drug and/or medicine options. **Non-drug options such as exercise, tai chi, physical therapy, or acupuncture can also help relieve pain** and make it easier to do daily tasks. Talking with your healthcare provider, you can find options that will be available, workable options for you.



## Will I have symptoms of withdrawal when I reduce my opioid dose?

If you have been taking opioids for a long time, your body is used to them. **A slow taper plan developed with your healthcare provider can help reduce your symptoms.** Medications can help and/or the taper can be slowed based on how you feel.

## Won't my pain increase as my opioid dose is reduced?

Some people who have lowered or stopped opioid medications report **no difference in pain relief.** Some people who stopped taking opioids reported feeling better than when they were taking opioids. These benefits can take time after stopping to develop.



These are general recommendations only; specific clinical decisions should be made by the treating clinician based on an individual patient's clinical condition.

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