



Opioids and Chronic Pain Management



Overview

Opioids are a powerful class of drugs. They can control severe pain. But they often aren't recommended for many types of chronic pain. That's because their long-term use can cause your body to begin to depend on them.

Physical Dependence

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 be helpful. But when you use them 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.

Withdrawal Symptoms

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.

Safe Use

Opioids can be used safely. But they aren't a good option for every patient, and they often aren't a good choice for chronic pain. Your doctor can recommend options that are right for you.