

Opioid Safety: What Every Patient Should Know

If you've been prescribed an opioid pain medication, these steps help it work for you — safely.

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PRESCRIBER

- 1 Is an opioid the best option for my pain?**
Ask about non-opioid medications, physical therapy, and other approaches first.
- 2 What's the lowest dose for the shortest time?**
Many acute pain needs are met in just a few days.
- 3 How does this mix with my other medications?**
Bring a full list — especially anxiety, sleep, and muscle-relaxant medicines.
- 4 What side effects or warning signs should I watch for?**
And what should I do if they appear?
- 5 Should my household have naloxone on hand?**
It's recommended for many patients taking opioids — free at isavefl.com.

TAKING OPIOIDS SAFELY

- **Follow the label exactly.** Never take more, more often, or longer than prescribed.
- **Never mix** with alcohol, benzodiazepines (like Xanax®), sleep aids, or other sedatives — the combination can stop your breathing.
- **Don't drive** or operate machinery until you know how the medication affects you.
- **Never share.** A dose that is safe for you can be fatal for someone else.
- **Use one prescriber and one pharmacy** for all pain medications when possible.

STORING & DISPOSING

- **Lock medications up** — out of sight and reach of children, teens, and visitors. Most misused pills come from home medicine cabinets.
- **Count your pills** occasionally so you'd notice if any went missing.
- **Dispose of leftovers promptly** at a drug take-back location or with a medication deactivation pouch — don't save them "just in case."

IF YOU NOTICE THESE SIGNS, TALK TO YOUR PROVIDER

- **Needing more** medication to get the same relief.
- **Taking it for reasons other than pain** — to relax, sleep, or feel better emotionally.
- **Running out early**, craving the next dose, or feeling unwell between doses.

Noticing a sign isn't failure. It's information.

Dependence can develop even when medication is taken as directed — it's a known medical effect, not a character flaw. Your provider can adjust your plan safely. **Never stop opioids suddenly on your own;** ask about tapering or other options.

Talk to your provider

Your first and best resource

211

Local help & referrals, 24/7

1-800-662-4357

SAMHSA Helpline, 24/7

isavefl.com

Free naloxone in Florida

This handout provides general educational information only and is not medical advice. Always follow the guidance of your healthcare provider regarding your medications. Resources shown are a sampling; inclusion does not constitute endorsement.

When Someone You Love Struggles with Opioids

You can't make recovery happen for them — but what you do matters more than you think.

SIGNS THAT MAY POINT TO OPIOID MISUSE

- **Changes in behavior:** withdrawing from family and friends, losing interest in activities, secrecy about whereabouts or money.
- **Trouble at work or school:** missed days, slipping performance, unexplained financial problems.
- **Medication patterns:** prescriptions running out early, "lost" pills, visits to multiple doctors, missing medication from the home.
- **Physical signs:** drowsiness or "nodding off," very small pupils, slurred speech, weight changes, frequent flu-like symptoms.
- **Mood shifts:** unusual irritability, anxiety, or depression — especially between doses.
- **Trust your instincts.** One sign alone proves nothing, but a pattern is worth a conversation.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

DO

- Pick a calm, private, sober moment — not mid-crisis.
- Use "I" statements: *"I've noticed... and I'm worried because I love you."*
- Listen more than you talk. Ask what they're feeling.
- Offer to help with a concrete next step — a call, a ride, sitting with them at an appointment.

DON'T

- Blame, shame, or label. Stigma drives people away from help.
- Lecture or argue when they're under the influence.
- Expect one conversation to fix it. Planting the seed counts.
- Give money that could fund use — help with needs directly instead.

Be ready for an overdose — even if you hope never to see one.

If your loved one uses opioids, **keep naloxone (Narcan®) at home and learn the signs:** unresponsiveness, slow or stopped breathing, blue lips, pinpoint pupils. Call 911, give naloxone, and stay with them. Florida's 911 Good Samaritan Act provides legal protections for those who call for help. Free naloxone: [isavefl.com](https://www.isavefl.com)

SUPPORTING THEIR RECOVERY

- **Treat it like the health condition it is.** Recovery often includes setbacks; your steady support helps them re-engage with care.
- **Encourage professional help** — treatment and medication (MAT) dramatically improve outcomes.
- **Set loving boundaries.** Supporting the person is not the same as supporting the use.

CARING FOR YOURSELF

- **You need support too.** Al-Anon (321-544-7943) and family programs connect you with people who understand.
- **Talk it out anytime:** the Family Support Warm Line (888-733-6303) is free, confidential, and 24/7.
- **Your wellbeing matters** — staying healthy yourself is part of helping them.

211

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[uplifters.org](https://www.uplifters.org)

Full local resource guide

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