

Are you worried about your opioid use?

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

What are opioids?

- Opioids are commonly prescribed to relieve pain.
- Some people may use them without a prescription to alleviate stress and anxiety.
- They belong to a class of drugs called 'depressants', which means that they slow down bodily functions like heart rate and breathing.
- There are many different types of opioids, including oxycodone, codeine and fentanyl.

What is opioid dependence?

If you have been taking opioids for an extended period of time your body can start to adjust to their presence, and they become less effective. This is known as 'tolerance'. For many this will result in the need for higher doses, or to take them more frequently.

It could also mean that if you stop (or significantly reduce) your opioid use, you could experience unpleasant side effects such as flu-like symptoms, body aches and stomach upset or pain. This is known as 'withdrawal'.

At this point, some people may use their opioids primarily to ease withdrawal symptoms, rather than for their original purpose.

Why should I be concerned?

Opioids are recommended - and are safest - when used for short periods of time to manage serious pain that may follow surgery or a serious injury. If you are needing opioids for severe ongoing pain, it is best to work with your doctor to find the lowest dose and shortest time needed, and to explore other medication and treatment options as well.

If you're living with chronic pain, long-term opioid use can cause other issues such as:

- an increased sensitivity to pain (this is called 'hyperalgesia')
- a suppressed immune system, meaning you are at a higher risk of disease and infection
- an increase or decrease in the level of bodily hormones, which can lead to reduced libido and sexual dysfunction
- a worsening of anxiety symptoms and/or low mood
- a decrease in your bone density leading to osteoporosis (brittle bones).

Am I dependent on opioids?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 In the past three months did you use your opioid medicines for other purposes, for example, to help you sleep or to help with stress or worry?
- 2 In the past three months did opioid medicines cause you to feel slowed down, sluggish or sedated?
- 3 In the past three months did opioid medicines cause you to lose interest in your usual activities?
- 4 In the past three months did you worry about your use of opioid medicines?

Reference: Routine Opioid Outcomes Monitoring (ROOM) Tool (Monash University)

If you answered yes to any of these questions you could be 'dependent' on your opioids.

What is Opioid Dependence Treatment?

Opioid Dependence Treatment (ODT) combines medication and other non-pharmaceutical supports (e.g., physical exercises and counselling) to help you to reduce your opioid use and achieve other health and personal goals.

ODT is a safer and more effective way to manage your ongoing symptoms by using longer acting medications that can be administered daily, weekly or even monthly. They can also be used in conjunction with other safer treatments to manage ongoing pain.

ODT will stop withdrawal symptoms occurring, is usually cheaper, has reduced side effects, and can be used long term or as a brief or 'transitional' treatment option.

How does it work?

Your doctor or a local alcohol and drug specialist will complete a full assessment to determine if ODT is right for you, then discuss medication options with you if appropriate. Once you are stable on your medication you will see your doctor for ongoing monitoring and management.

What costs are involved?

The Commonwealth supports access to medicines for the treatment of opioid dependence through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).