

Using Pain Medicine Safely

Take your medicines exactly as your doctor directs.

Mistakes, misuse, or overdosing can cause serious health problems or death.

Pain medicines can help you live comfortably day to day. They manage pain, but they cannot always take it away entirely.

Prescription pain medicines are very strong drugs. Taking too much can cause serious side effects or death. Lowering your dose too quickly may make you feel very sick. This is withdrawal.

Pain Medicine Side Effects

- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Dry mouth
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Constipation

Prevent Side Effects

- Take your pain medicine with food.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Take a stool softener if needed.

Avoid Overdose and Accidents

Overdose is when you take too much of a medicine. Overdose with pain medication can be dangerous.

- Watch for the signs of pain medicine overdose:
 - Severe sleepiness
 - Difficulty waking up
 - Trouble breathing
 - Confusion
 - Blue lips or fingernails
 - Cool, moist skin
- When you are taking prescription pain medicines, do NOT drink alcohol. Mixing the two can be deadly.
- When you are taking prescription pain medicines, do NOT drive or operate machines.

- Never take more than 3,000 mg of acetaminophen in 24 hours. Taking more than that may damage your liver. Many medicines have it. These include Tylenol®, Lortab®, Vicodin®, Percocet®, as well as many over-the-counter products, especially those for colds. If you are not sure if a medicine is safe for you, ask your doctor or pharmacist. **Take your medicines exactly as your doctor directs.**

Avoid Misuse

- Keep all your medicine in a safe, secure place. Make sure small children cannot get to it. They often think pills are candy. Other people may be tempted to steal or abuse your medicines.
- Never share your medicines. Never take someone else's medicines. This is illegal, and it can be deadly.
- Never take medicines after the expiration date on the label.
- University of Utah Health Pharmacies have 12 areas where you can get rid of your medicines that you no longer need. Bring any medications to our drop off bins to get rid of them safely. For more details and locations visit <https://healthcare.utah.edu/pharmacy/medication-disposal.php>. Your local police station can also tell you how to get rid of them safely. NEVER pour medicines down the drain or toilet.
- Tell your doctor all the supplements, vitamins, and medicines you take. Pain medicines can be dangerous when mixed with other medicines or supplements.
- Use the same pharmacy for all your prescriptions. Your pharmacist can tell you more about medicines you should not combine. They can explain how to take your pain medicine safely.

If you suspect an overdose, call 911 immediately!