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## Pain medications - narcotics

Narcotics are also called opioid pain relievers. They are used only for pain that is severe and is not helped by other types of painkillers. When used carefully and under a health care provider's direct care, these drugs can be effective at reducing pain.

Narcotics work by binding to receptors in the brain, which blocks the feeling of pain.

You should not use a narcotic drug for more than 3 to 4 months, unless you are under direct care of your provider.

### NAMES OF NARCOTICS

- Codeine
- Fentanyl -- available as a patch
- Hydrocodone
- Hydromorphone
- Meperidine
- Morphine
- Oxycodone
- Tramadol

### TAKING NARCOTICS

These drugs can be abused and habit-forming. They have been associated with accidental overdose deaths. Always take narcotics as prescribed. Your provider may suggest that you take your medicine only when you feel pain.

Or, your doctor may suggest taking a narcotic on a regular schedule. Allowing the medicine to wear off before taking more of it can make the pain difficult to control.

Taking narcotics to control the pain of cancer or other medical problems does not itself lead to dependence.

Store narcotics safely and securely in your home.

You may need a pain specialist to help you manage long-term pain.

## SIDE EFFECTS OF NARCOTICS

Drowsiness and impaired judgment often occur with these medicines. When taking a narcotic, do not drink alcohol, drive, or operate heavy machinery.

You can relieve itching by reducing the dose or talking to your doctor about switching medicines.

To help with constipation, drink more fluids, get more exercise, eat foods with extra fiber, and use stool softeners.

If nausea or vomiting occur, try taking the narcotic with food.

Withdrawal symptoms are common when you stop taking a narcotic. Symptoms include strong desire for the medicine (craving), yawning, insomnia, restlessness, mood swings, or diarrhea. To prevent withdrawal symptoms, your doctor may recommend you gradually lower the dosage over time.

## Alternative Names

Painkillers; Drugs for pain; Analgesics; Opioids

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