

Signs of Heroin and Prescription Opioid Misuse

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Doctors may treat pain with legal opioid medicines. These medicines help people not feel as much pain. It also makes some people feel “high” or very good. But people’s bodies can become used to opioids. This can lead to misuse.

There are two things that happen when a body becomes used to opioids. *Tolerance* means it takes more and more medicine to treat pain or feel high. *Physical dependence* means the body will get sick without opioids. This type of sickness is called *withdrawal*. A person going through withdrawal may have:

- Anxiety and distress
- Insomnia
- Pain
- Sweating
- Chills
- Stomach cramps
- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fever

Opioid misuse

Opioid misuse is a widespread disease in America. More than 2 million people misuse prescription opioids. At least half a million people use heroin. Sadly, more and more people are dying from opioid misuse. Some people overdose. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that nearly 80 people die from opioid overdoses every day. Many others die in accidents caused by opioid misuse.

Signs of misuse

Misuse of opioids can cause problems in all areas of a person’s life. It can be hard to tell if a person is misusing opioids. She probably will not tell you. But you may find signs of misuse. You may see differences in how she looks, acts, and interacts with others. These signs include:

- Obsession with getting the opioid
- Sneaking around or being dishonest
- Missing money or valuables
- Too much time spent getting and using opioids

- Missing work or school
- Poor work or school performance
- Changes in personality or appearance
- Changes in physical or behavioral health
- Problems with social and personal relationships
- Getting into dangerous situations for opioids
- Switching groups of friends
- Using opioids even when it creates problems
- Slurred speech or stumbling
- Itchiness
- Any use of heroin

Other clues that someone is misusing prescription opioids include:

- Taking more medicine than prescribed
- Continuing to take the medicine after a condition is healed
- Claiming to lose opioids
- Trying to refill prescriptions early
- Asking for a higher dose
- “Doctor shopping” or visiting other doctors to get opioids
- Buying opioids illegally
- Empty prescription bottles before their refill date
- Bottles from different drug stores
- Several written prescriptions
- A blank prescription pad
- Fake identification

Other clues that someone is using heroin or other illegal opioids include:

- Long sleeves in the summer
- Track marks from needle use
- Little plastic bags
- A burnt or bent spoon
- Syringes or medical needles
- A belt or rubber tubing
- A glass pipe

Risk factors

Opioid misuse does not happen only to some groups of people. Anyone can misuse opioids. However, some things raise peoples’ risk. A family history of substance misuse can be a factor. Children who show signs of violent behavior are more likely to misuse opioids. Experts say they these children struggle with self-control. Having a parent or other caregiver around is important for all children. Children who do not have a lot of supervision may also be at risk for opioid misuse later in life, so may children and teens that spend time with people who misuse opioids.

Resources

Narconon

www.narconon.org
(800) 775-8750

National Institute on Drug Abuse
www.drugabuse.gov
(301) 443-1124

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov
(877) 726-4727

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