



The opioid epidemic is having a devastating impact in communities across the nation, fueling a dramatic increase in premature deaths.  
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According to the most recent Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) National Drug Threat Assessment, 53.1% of people who misuse prescription pain relievers get their drugs from a friend or relative for free, in exchange for payment, or by theft. This is why it is so important to never share medication with others, and to safely store and dispose of all prescription medicines.

## Rx Drugs Safe Storage & Disposal

If any of your prescription drugs are expired, they should be disposed of in the correct way. Expired medication might no longer be safe or effective. Make sure your prescription medicine is stored in the original packaging with the safety cap tightly secured, and keep your medicine in a safe place out of the reach of children and pets.

Store any prescription narcotics like morphine, opioids, or codeine in a locked cabinet, drawer, or medicine safe. These painkillers are the most abused prescription medicines and are responsible for more than 75% of overdose deaths.

Abuse of these opioid-based drugs can lead to dizziness, sedation, weakness, sweating, and more. One high dose of an opioid drug can depress breathing and lead to coma, or death. Abruptly stopping opioid use can lead to withdrawal symptoms—including restlessness, vomiting, diarrhea, pain, and chills. Safe storage of these controlled medications is especially important, as they can be extremely dangerous if taken when not prescribed or not as prescribed.

You should dispose of any and all unused or expired prescription medicine as soon as possible. Timely disposal of prescription drugs can reduce the risk of others taking the medication accidentally or misusing the medicine intentionally.

The best and most environmentally friendly way to dispose of your prescription medication is through a drug take-back program. DEA periodically provides drug disposal sites in cities and towns across the nation. The DEA also has permanent drug disposal sites in many pharmacies and hospitals.

In Georgia, you can access a list of drug disposal sites here: <https://stoprxabuseinga.org/prescription-drug-disposal/>.

If there are no disposal sites in your area, there are ways to safely dispose of your medication at home.

Be sure to read the packaging label on your medicine before discarding it. Controlled substances and other medicines can be harmful if ingested by others, so the label may have special disposal instructions that you should follow. If there are no special instructions, you can safely dispose of your medication in your household trash by following these four steps:

1. Mix your medicine with dirt, cat litter, or old coffee grounds.
2. Put the mixture in a container, such as a sealed plastic bag.
3. Throw the container in your household trash.
4. Scratch out all the personal information on the prescription label of your empty medication bottle to make it unreadable. Then dispose or recycle the empty medication bottle.

## Rx Drug Overdose

While prescription opioids are often used to treat chronic and acute pain—and, when used appropriately, can be an important component of treatment—serious risks are associated with their use.

Risk of overdose and death becomes greater when opioids are taken at higher doses; for longer periods of time; more often than prescribed; when combined with benzodiazepines (also known as “benzos,” and include diazepam and alprazolam), other sedatives, or alcohol; and when combined with other opioids, including illicit opioids like heroin.

More than 60% of drug overdose deaths are due to prescription drug abuse, and opioid drugs are responsible for the most deaths, followed by benzodiazepines. Men are two times more likely to die of an overdose than women, and people between the ages of 45 and 49 have the highest death rates from drug overdoses. Fentanyl is being sold as counterfeit prescription pills, and is involved in more deaths than any other illegal drug. Overdoses involving opioids killed almost 50,000 people in 2019. It is essential to carefully consider all the risks of using prescription opioids alongside their benefits.

### **Prescription Drug Addiction**

Anyone who takes prescription opioids can become addicted to them.

Opioid use disorder (OUD), often referred to as “opioid addiction,” occurs when attempts to cut down or control opioid use are unsuccessful, or when use results in social problems and a failure to fulfill obligations at work, school, and home.

To avoid prescription drug addiction, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends talking to your doctor about ways to manage your pain that

do not involve prescription opioids. Some of these options may actually work better, and have fewer risks and side effects. Depending on the type of pain you are experiencing, options may include:

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®)
- Cognitive behavioral therapy—a psychological, goal-directed approach in which patients learn how to modify physical, behavioral, and emotional triggers of pain and stress
- Exercise therapy, including physical therapy
- Medications for depression or for seizures
- Interventional therapies (injections)
- Exercise and weight loss
- Other therapies such as acupuncture and massage

If opioid-based drugs are the only option available for pain treatment, talk to your doctor about your medical and mental health history, any medications you are taking, and if you or anyone in your family has a history of substance misuse or addiction. Never take opioids in higher amounts or more often than prescribed. Also ask about the serious side effects (like excessive sleepiness or craving more of the medication), so you and your family know when to call a doctor or go to the hospital.

Always let your doctor know about any concerns you may have about taking prescription medicines. Tell your doctor if you continue to experience pain while taking opioids, and discuss other ways to reduce your pain.