

What are opioids?

Opioids include many prescription pain relievers. Heroin, an illegal drug, is also an opioid. Fentanyl is a legally prescribed opioid that is also frequently produced illegally in the black market. Made from the opium poppy plant, or produced artificially to have a similar effect, all opioids affect the brain's regions that produce feelings of reward. Opioids activate the brain's opioid receptors and reduce pain by attaching to these receptors, reducing the perception of pain.

Examples of opioids:

Methadone	Codeine	Hydromorphone (Dilaudid)	Oxymorphone (Opana)
Heroin	Fentanyl (Duragesic)	Meperidine (Demerol)	Oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet)
Kratom	Hydrocodone (Vicodin, Norco)	Methadone Morphine (MS Contin, Kadian)	Tramadol (Ultram)

What happens if you stop or cut back on opioids suddenly?

Consumption of opioids can cause **physical dependence**. Over time, more of the drug is needed for the same effect. This is called **drug tolerance**. If you stop or cut back on opioids after regular use of a few weeks or more, you will experience unpleasant symptoms called **withdrawal**.

Early symptoms of withdrawal include:

- Agitation
- Anxiety
- Muscle aches
- Increased tearing
- Trouble Sleeping
- Runny nose
- Sweating
- Yawning

Late symptoms of withdrawal include:

- Abdominal cramping
- Anxiety and Depression
- Cravings
- Dilated pupils
- Goose bumps
- Nausea and Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Pain
- Trouble Sleeping

What can happen if you take too much of an opioid or mix opioids? --Overdose

If you are taking an opioid, you are at risk of an overdose. An opioid-overdose is what happens when your body becomes overwhelmed by:

- too much of that opioid
- a combination of different opioids
- a combination of an opioid and other substances like benzodiazepines (eg. sleeping pills), alcohol, cocaine or methamphetamine.

Recognize the **signs of an overdose**.

- Failure to respond when spoken to
- Slow or no breathing
- Tiny pupils (the center part of the eye)
- Fingernails or lips are turning blue or purple

Risks of an overdose include:

- Stopping your breathing
- Brain injury resulting seizures, nerve damage, paralysis and stroke.
- Organ damage such as heart problems, kidney failure or lung damage
- Death



Resources

Looking for a new primary care provider or pain management specialist?

No matter where you live in **Alaska**, **2-1-1** is your one-stop resource for connecting with a wide variety of services in your community including emergency food and shelter, educational opportunities, alcohol and drug treatment programs, senior services, childcare, and much more. Just dial 2-1-1 or search at: <https://alaska211.org/search-our-database/>

Struggling with anxiety, depression, or just feeling isolated?



Thinking about treatment?

- [Treatmentconnection.com](https://treatmentconnection.com) will help you find Alaska agencies providing substance use disorder treatment with real-time availability.
- <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/> has a list of providers throughout Alaska. SAMHSA has a national helpline available 24/7 to assist with finding behavioral health support or substance use management, 800-662-HELP (4357).

Want to prevent overdose or overdose death among you or loved ones?

To prevent overdose:

- Do not use more than the prescribed amount of prescription opioid
- Do not mix opioids with benzodiazepines, alcohol, or other tranquilizers
- Do not mix opioids with methamphetamines or cocaine

To prevent death when someone overdoses:

- Call 911
- Conduct CPR
- Get and use Narcan. [Narcan® \(Naloxone\)](#) can temporarily block or reverse the effects of opioids. In most cases the effect is immediate (within 30 to 40 seconds), blocking the effects of the overdose and allowing the person to breathe again. This gives time to seek emergency medical assistance. Narcan® will have no effect if accidentally administered or self-administered. Narcan® can be obtained through a medical provider. Project HOPE, a State of Alaska program, offers Narcan® through various community organizations at no charge. Contact your local Public Health Center or email ProjectHOPE@alaska.gov for Narcan near you.

