

Opioids: Your Guide to a Safe Recovery After Surgery

A simple guide for taking, lower, and getting rid of opioid medications safely

RECOVERY ROADMAP

1

Early Recovery



Opioids are short-term tools.

Use them only for severe pain right after surgery.

2

As You Heal



Taking less is a good sign.

Lowering your dose means your body is healing.

3

As Pain Gets Better



Match the dose to your pain.

Take less medicine as your pain improves.

SAFETY AT HOME



Store Medications Safely.

Keep opioids locked up or out of reach of children and visitors.



Proper Disposal

Take unused pills to a pharmacy take-back program.



Safe Storage Protects Everyone.

Safe storage helps prevent accidental use, misuse by others, and harm to pets or children.

Myths

MYTH VERSUS FACT

Facts



I should finish the whole bottle.



Stop or take less as pain improves.



I should keep extra pills just in case.



Throw away leftover pills.



Tapering less medication means my treatment plan failed.



Tapering is a normal part of recovery.

What This Means for You

Opioids may help with severe pain after surgery; however, they are for short-term rather than long-term use. As your body heals, your pain should slowly get better, and you should need less opioid medication. Lowering your opioid dose (called tapering) often is a sign that you are healing well.

Safe Opioid Use

Opioids work best in the early days of recovery, when pain is the strongest. As your pain improves, try taking less opioids and use simpler pain treatments if you can. This decreases the risk of side effects.

Tapering

Some patients worry that taking less opioid medication means their pain is not controlled. This usually is not true. In most patients, taking less opioids means your pain is getting better and your body is healing. Your treatment plan should change as your pain changes.

Safety at Home

Keep opioids in a safe place, such as a locked cabinet or a spot out of reach of children, visitors, and pets. Do not save extra pills just in case. Unused opioids may be dangerous if someone takes them by mistake.

Safe Disposal

Dispose of opioids you no longer need. The best option is a pharmacy take-back program. Safe disposal helps protect your family and community.

Common Myths

Some patients believe they should finish the whole bottle, they should keep extra pills, or tapering means their pain management plan failed. These ideas are not true. A safer recovery plan is to:

- Use opioids only for hard-to-control pain
- Take less medication as pain improves
- Throw away unused pills

Key Takeaway

Use opioids only if needed and for a short time. Take the lowest dose possible, keep them safe, and stop when your pain improves. If you have questions, call your doctor or pharmacist.

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