

# Abuse of Prescription Pain Medications

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**Addiction** is when a person loses control of their use of prescription drugs or other substance abuse. Addicted people use the drug even though there is a risk of harm or negative consequence. Despite loss of job, family, and poor health, drug use will continue.

**Physical dependence** is a natural body response to use of a drug. Any person taking a drug for a diagnosed medical condition will develop dependence after a couple of weeks of use. This is a normal part of the treatment process. However, with diabetes or other health conditions, this dependence is a required part of medical treatment. People who are using a medication under medical supervision are dependent but not addicted. With prescribed use of pain pills medical supervision is necessary before use of the prescribed treatment is stopped. If you or someone you love seems to be developing addiction to pain pills, please discuss this with a health care provider.

## Why use pain medicines at all?

Narcotic pain medications are good at managing pain with relatively minor side effects. However, if used improperly, these medications also have some major risks. Taking higher doses than are prescribed or using alcohol with medications can produce changes in breathing patterns, a feeling of being “high” and may cause seizure or death. Taking more of a drug than is prescribed, sharing pills with others, or taking pills to get high are examples of prescription misuse. It is important for your health and pain management to use this medication as advised by your doctor.

## Why become addicted?

To some, it may seem difficult to understand how a legal prescription can lead to a physical addiction. When used as prescribed, this risk is very low. However, when medications are shared or taken larger than prescribed doses, the risk of addiction increases. Addiction, the out of control use of a substance starts in someone who suffers strong cravings and feeds that craving with more of the drug. This use continues even when the thrill of use is gone and their habit begins to harm their health, finances, and personal relationships. So often, lack of communication, sharing, or taking a medication without a medical condition is where problems begin.

## How do drug abusers view their use of these pills?

In situations of prescription drug abuse and addiction, users believe they need these drugs to feel “normal”. Others believe these substances are necessary for life. Many with drug addictions often take more medication than is prescribed, take medication prescribed to others, seek a false prescription, or buy these drugs on the street or on the internet in order to be able to take the pills. Over time, people who abuse pills have trouble paying bills, keeping a job, and getting along with loved ones.

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# Abuse of Prescription Pain Medications *continued*

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Use and abuse over time increases the risk of:

- Organ damage
- Poor dental health
- Sexual reproductive disease
- Kidney stones
- Physical injury
- Addiction
- Legal involvement

Addictions to these substances bring with them less ability to remember and think about important things in every day life.

Family relationships often suffer as loved ones of the substance involved member try to understand effects including:

- Personality changes
- Mood swings
- Irritability

Behaviors often become less expected and may include employment problems and money management problems. Relationship problems related to effects of substance abuse put strains on the entire family. Drug users can be very good at hiding their addiction from family members.

If you or your family member are struggling with addiction, please get help.

**UNITE Treatment Referral Line:  
1.866.908.6483**

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