



EFR EMPLOYEE &amp; FAMILY RESOURCES

# THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC



## THOUSANDS DIE EACH YEAR FROM OPIOID OVERDOSE. ARE YOU AWARE OF THE RISKS?

Learn about the rising opioid epidemic and how you can safely navigate your prescriptions, as well as become more aware of the risks of opioid misuse and addiction.

The most fatally abused drugs in the United States are legal and sitting in medicine cabinets throughout the country. These drugs are opioid pain relievers.

### What are Opioids?

Opioids are a class of drugs that respond to nerve cells in the body and brain, producing a sense of euphoria and pain relief.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, opioids include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids like fentanyl, as well as prescription pain relievers, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, codein, and many others.

### Sparking an Epidemic

According to the CDC, the number of fatal overdoses in 2017 (roughly 45,000) was six times greater than that in 1999. Moreover, about 130 Americans, on average, die each day from an opioid overdose.

In response to the alarming increase in opioid-related overdose deaths, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency on opioid pain relievers in 2017.

### Understanding the Risks

According to a public opinion poll conducted by the National Safety Council, 9 out of 10 opioid painkiller users said they were not concerned about becoming addicted. However, about 60 percent of respondents reported at least one addiction risk factor when considering

personal and family histories.

While genetics account for 50-75 percent of the risk for addiction, other risk factors include: psychological factors (such as stress, certain mental illnesses, and personality traits), environmental influences (such as exposure to trauma, access, and substance use or addiction in friend and family circles), starting drug misuse at an early age, as well as certain brain characteristics that increase vulnerability to addiction.

Additionally, addiction to prescription pain medications can lead to illicit drug use. Studies show 4-6 percent of opioid misusers transition to using heroin, and that 80 percent of new heroin users started with opioid pain relievers.

## BUILD AWARENESS

Wear purple on August 31 to commemorate Overdose Awareness Day.



## Upholding Safety

Because many people do not fully understand the risks of opioid pain killers, here are some quick tips and facts from the National Safety Council to promote drug safety:

1. It is a felony to share opioid painkillers with friends or family (or anyone else whose name is not on the prescription bottle).
2. More than half of those who misuse opioids get them from a friend or family member. Rather than letting leftover medication into wrong hands, find a [disposal location near you](#) or [request a Stericycle pill return envelope](#) to safely dispose of the medication.
3. Never mix your opioid pain killers with alcohol or other drugs. It can intensify the effects of the opioid.
4. Do not take extended-release opioids "as needed" for pain or more frequently than what your doctor prescribed.

5. If you are taking other medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist to ensure you won't have harmful drug interactions.
6. Request an "Opioid Warn Me" label. Place this label on insurance and prescription cards to let doctors and pharmacists know you want answers to the following: a) if you're being prescribed an opioid, b) if so, if there is a non-addictive alternative, c) if no alternatives exist, if a short-term prescription is possible, and d) if any medical conditions, mental health issues, or family history could increase your risk of addiction.

## Getting Help

Your Employee Assistance Program offers counseling sessions to help you with something as challenging as addiction. To access services, call **800.327.4692** to speak with a masters-level clinician, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If you are in a situation where you

suspect someone has overdosed on opioids, **call 911**. Even if the patient wakes up or seems better, emergency medical assistance is still necessary.

Follow [these steps](#) to empower yourself and your co-workers in case of an opioid overdose-related emergency in the workplace.



## WELLNESS

### Mind-Body Decompression



Looking for a way to ease tension, reduce stress, and let yourself relax? There are many things you can consider to help your mind and body find peace and lessen pain without turning to prescription medication, alcohol, or other drugs. Consider these ways to decompress:

- Massage Therapy
- Reiki
- Acupuncture
- Chiropractic Manipulation
- Physical Therapy
- Exercise
- Talk Therapy
- Yoga
- Hypnosis
- Music Therapy
- Art Therapy
- Pet Therapy



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