

OxyContin

straight talk



What is OxyContin?

OxyContin (“Oxy” or “OC” on the street) is a time-released pain medication. It was developed in 1995 for people needing around-the-clock pain relief, so they don’t have to take pills as often. OxyContin contains oxycodone, which is an opioid drug, like morphine, codeine, heroin and methadone. Oxycodone is the same opioid that’s in Percocet, Oxycocet and Endocet.

What’s the difference between Percocet and OxyContin?

Both Percocet and OxyContin relieve pain, but while Percocet gives relief for about five hours, the effects of OxyContin last for about 12 hours.

Percocet contains five milligrams of oxycodone, which is all released when the pill is taken. Percocet also contains acetaminophen (the drug in Tylenol), which makes people sick if they take a lot of it.

OxyContin doesn’t contain acetaminophen. It is pure oxycodone in amounts much larger than in Percocet. In Canada, OxyContin pills come with 10, 20, 40 or 80 mg of oxycodone. Just one OxyContin pill can have the same amount of oxycodone as 16 Percocet pills.

With OxyContin, only part of the oxycodone is released when the pill is taken. The rest of the oxycodone has been coated so that it is released into the body slowly. This is how OxyContin relieves pain for so many hours.

What will taking OxyContin do?

When taken as prescribed, OxyContin is safe, but when it is taken in other ways, it can be very dangerous.

The problems start when people looking for a “rush” get around OxyContin’s slow release of oxycodone by crushing or chewing the pill. When OxyContin

is crushed or chewed, all the oxycodone is released at once, as happens with Percocet. But with OxyContin, there is much more oxycodone, and no acetaminophen to make you sick if you take a lot.

When you take OxyContin without a prescription or not as prescribed, you could:

- **Overdose.** Signs of overdose include difficult or slow breathing, and extreme sleepiness. The risk of overdose increases if you take OxyContin with other opioids, alcohol or tranquilizers. An overdose of OxyContin can lead to brain damage or death. If you think someone has overdosed on OxyContin, *call 911!*
- **Get hooked.** If you take OxyContin regularly to get high, soon it gives you less and less pleasure. And if you stop taking it, you go into withdrawal and feel terrible. Before long, getting the drug to avoid sickness takes over your life. How long it takes to reach this point varies from person to person, but it can be quick.
- **Feel lousy.** Apart from withdrawal sickness, taking OxyContin can have side-effects such as constipation, sexual problems, swelling, nausea, sweating, itching and sleepiness.
- **Get infected.** Injecting OxyContin has the same risks as injecting heroin—people who share needles can get HIV, hepatitis and other life-threatening infections, or they can infect other people.
- **Get busted.** Just having someone else’s OxyContin is a crime—you risk arrest, conviction and a criminal record.
- **Make things worse.** Taking OxyContin to “self-medicate” for physical pain or to numb emotions only adds to your problems. OxyContin seems to make things better at first, but once you’re hooked on it, your life will be much worse. Covering up what you’re feeling with OxyContin prevents you from dealing with your problems, and gets in your way of finding help when you need it.

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If I take OxyContin that isn't prescribed to me, what can I do to be safer?

Taking OxyContin without a prescription, or not as prescribed, is always risky. But if you are going to take it, you can reduce the risk of overdose if you:

- don't crush or chew OxyContin before swallowing it
- don't crush and snort OxyContin
- don't dissolve OxyContin in water and inject it
- don't take OxyContin if you aren't used to taking opioids
- don't take OxyContin with other opioids, alcohol or tranquillizers (such as Valium)
- don't take OxyContin by yourself, with no one to help you if you overdose
- don't take OxyContin soon after you withdraw from opioids.

If you take OxyContin, you can be *safer* if you avoid taking it in these ways, but the only *safe* way to take it is as your doctor prescribes it to you.

If I take OxyContin that isn't prescribed to me, I'm only hurting myself, right?

Wrong.

Buying OxyContin on the street gives money to people who commit crimes. They may steal OxyContin from drugstores or from family members or others who are sick, or may sell OxyContin that was prescribed to them. Prescribed OxyContin is often paid for with tax dollars or by private health insurance. Buying OxyContin that was prescribed to someone, and paid for by our health care system, wastes money spent on medication for sick people.

The effects of OxyContin make it harder to drive or operate machinery safely. If you drive a motor vehicle after taking OxyContin, you are more likely to crash, and hurt someone.

How do I know if I'm hooked on OxyContin?

If you take OxyContin every day, your body will get used to the drug. You may be hooked if:

- you need to take more and more OxyContin to get the same effect
- you have withdrawal symptoms—such as shakes, cramps, vomiting, muscle pain, trouble sleeping and agitation—if you stop taking OxyContin all at once
- you spend so much time and money getting OxyContin that you don't take care of important things in your life
- you keep using OxyContin despite the problems it causes in your life.

If these things happen, you will probably need help getting off OxyContin.

What should I do if I can't stop taking OxyContin?

There is help!

A doctor can prescribe medication to help ease withdrawal. You can withdraw from OxyContin at home or, if needed, in a withdrawal centre.

After withdrawal, you can get help to keep you from going back to using OxyContin (relapsing), through group support, counselling or a stay at a drug treatment centre. Staying off all other mood-altering drugs (including alcohol) is important in preventing relapse. People who relapse over and over, and who don't have success with other treatments, may need methadone maintenance treatment.

For more information, see your doctor or contact one of the agencies listed below.

Where can I get help with drugs?

CAMH intake: 416 535-8501 ext. 6128

MAARS (Metro Addiction Assessment Referral Service): 416 599-1448 (in Toronto)

DART (Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment, Ontario): 1 800 565-8603

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3165b / 09-06 / P412