

- Keep opioids and all other drugs in a safe and secure place—if possible, locked in a security box or cabinet.
- Keep track of the number of pills in a container. If the number of pills doesn't match your normal use or you need to refill your prescription sooner than expected, someone else may be taking your medication.
- Model safe and appropriate use of medication and other legal substances that you may use, such as alcohol.
- Always follow the directions on the label. Call your health care provider if you have questions. Never share your medication.
- At least once a year, clean out your medicine cabinet and bring leftover or old medications to your local pharmacist for safe disposal. Do not flush medications or throw them in the garbage.
- Spread the word. Ask your friends and family to put these tips into action in their homes. Share this information with others.

How do I recognize the signs of a problem?

Signs of a problem with opioids or other substances may include mood changes (for example, irritability, depression or agitation); personality changes; lack of interest in school or other activities; changes in energy, sleep or appetite; change in friends or hangout locations; secretiveness; borrowing money or having extra cash.

Around the house, watch for missing pills or unfamiliar pills. If your teen has a prescription, keep control of the bottle and be aware if he or she runs out of pills too quickly, loses pills or requests refills.

What should I do if I suspect a problem?

If you think your teen may be misusing opioids:

- Pick a good time to raise the issue—when people are calm and there are no distractions. Raising the issue when you are angry or when the young person is under the influence of painkillers is not a good idea.
- Let your teen know you care, and that that's why you are raising the issue.
- Refer to specific events. Talk about the problematic behaviour in a factual, honest but tactful way. For example, "I'm really concerned about you—you just didn't seem to be yourself when you came home last night" is better than "I think you've been using Dad's painkillers to get high."
- If you are unsure whether your teen is misusing painkillers, check it out in a concerned way. Accusations can lead the person to deny a problem, even if one exists. Ask questions that encourage your teen to talk rather than give yes or no answers.
- Focus your comments on the effects the teen's use of painkillers has on you, on others in the family and on your teen.
- Offer support. Let your teen know that you are prepared to help change things that may be contributing to his or her use of opioids.
- Get support from someone you trust, such as a family member, a friend, a counsellor, your doctor or a religious leader.
- Learn as much as you can about prescription painkillers and get help available in your community.

What are the signs of an overdose?

Opioids slow down the part of the brain that controls breathing. Signs of overdose include slow breathing, bluish skin and coma (the person won't "wake up"). If you suspect an overdose, call 911 immediately.

Where can I get help?

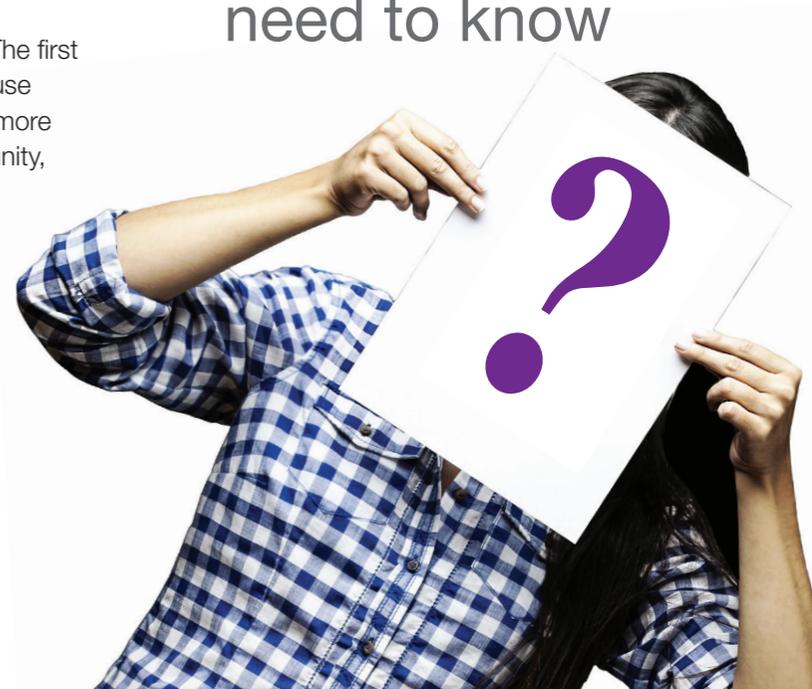
Every journey begins with a single step. The first step toward taking action on substance use concerns is usually a telephone call. For more information about options in your community, talk to your doctor or contact

ConnexOntario's Drug & Alcohol Helpline at **1 800 565-8603** or **www.connexontario.ca**.

Disponible en français.

Youth and prescription painkillers

What parents need to know



For more information on addiction and mental health issues, or to download a copy of this brochure, please visit our website: www.camh.ca

To order other CAMH publications, please contact Sales and Distribution:
 Toll-free: 1 800 661-1111
 Toronto: 416 595-6059
 E-mail: publications@camh.ca
 Online store: <http://store.camh.ca>

Copyright © CAMH 2012 4549 / 12-2012 PM071 E

camh A Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization Collaborating Centre
 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Fully affiliated with the University of Toronto



Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario
 Ensuring Continued Trust



Ontario College of Pharmacists
 Putting patients first since 1871



Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

What are prescription opioids?

Prescription opioids, sometimes called prescription painkillers, are now one of the most commonly misused substances among Ontario youth. When used appropriately, they can be very effective in treating severe pain. But opioids can also produce a state of euphoria, making them prone to misuse. There are two types of opioid pain pills:

- over-the-counter opioids, which include drugs containing codeine, such as 222s and Tylenol 1.
- opioids that must be prescribed by a doctor or dentist, which include Tylenol 2, 3 and 4; OxyNEO (previously OxyContin); Demerol; Percocet; Talwin; Dilaudid; tramadol and Darvon.

Why should I be concerned?

Many parents do not realize the extent of prescription opioid misuse (use without a prescription) among youth, and the effects and risks of this non-medical use. In recent years, prescription opioids used non-medically have replaced tobacco as the third most commonly used drug among Ontario teens (at about 14%), behind alcohol and marijuana. Younger students, particularly those in grades 7 and 8, are misusing opioids in far greater numbers than marijuana.

What should I be concerned about?

Many young people mistakenly believe that prescription opioids are safer than street drugs. They think that because opioids are prescribed medicines, using these drugs is not as dangerous as using drugs such as cocaine or methamphetamine. This is a myth. Opioids are powerful

medications, and misusing them can be harmful for a variety of reasons:

- Opioids can be addictive. This may include physical dependence, where over time a person's body gets used to the drug and develops tolerance to some of its effects. This means that the person needs to take more and more to get the same feeling. As the amount taken increases, so does the risk of overdose.
- Teens who are dependent on opioids may experience withdrawal if they suddenly stop using the drug. The symptoms of withdrawal include intense restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting and cold flashes. The experience of withdrawal can lead to depression and suicidal feelings, resulting in a cycle that can end with suicide or unintentional overdose.
- Time-released products such as MS Contin, designed to deliver pain-relieving medication slowly over several hours, are sometimes crushed and snorted or injected. This was a common problem with OxyContin, which has now been replaced with OxyNEO, which is more difficult to crush. Crushing slow-release products causes the drug to enter the system all at once, sometimes resulting in an overdose. With an overdose, breathing slows down and eventually stops, and death may occur.
- When opioids are combined with alcohol and/or some other prescription or over-the-counter drugs, the risk of overdose increases.
- Opioids can impair decision making and may result in risky decisions that lead to teens being injured or killed due to fighting, having a car crash or attempting suicide.

Isn't use of street drugs more harmful?

Misuse of prescription opioids can be at least as harmful as using alcohol or street drugs. Also, it is illegal for anyone without a prescription to possess, use or share prescription opioids. If they are found in a student's locker or car, the person can be charged with possession of drugs.

How do young people get them?

More than two-thirds of students (67%) using opioid painkillers non-medically reported getting the medication from home.

Why do young people misuse prescription opioids?

Most teens and adults do not understand the risks involved in misusing prescription drugs. Teens may use opioids non-medically for pleasure or to help them handle stress, because:

- they don't understand the risks of taking drugs not prescribed specifically for them
- they think the drugs are safe to use because they are made in a pharmaceutical facility and have been prescribed to someone by a physician
- prescription opioids are easier to get than street drugs
- they have not yet learned other ways to help them cope with stress or unpleasant feelings.

Are there risks even if a young person is prescribed an opioid?

Yes. Prescription opioids are very strong medications and, without careful monitoring, could lead to addiction. Opioids may be prescribed for pain control when other medications have not provided relief. However, careful monitoring by a health professional is essential.

Risk factors for opioid misuse by adolescents include poor academic performance, higher risk-taking levels, depression and regular use of alcohol, marijuana and nicotine. In this population misuse and overdose are the greatest risks.

How can I help prevent problems?

Education and controlled access can help reduce the risk of opioid misuse, especially by youth. Put these tips into action and help keep our youth and communities healthy and safe:

- Create the opportunity for open and clear communication about medication and drug use. Ensure that everyone in the house knows what opioids are, their effects and risks, and to call 911 if a person has an overdose.
- Negotiate clear rules with your teen about the use of prescription opioids, just as you do about alcohol and other drug use. Some examples of clear rules are never taking prescription opioids with alcohol and not sharing medication with others.
- If you or your teen needs pain relief, talk to your health care provider about trying alternatives to opioids first (for example, ibuprofen or acetaminophen). If opioids are needed, ask to try a less powerful type of opioid first, and ask for an opioid prescription with fewer pills.