

# Taper Your Opioids

*Learn how to take less medicine and have less pain*

## What does it mean to taper?

You may hear us talk about tapering your opioids. This means to slowly take less of your opioid medicine over time. Before you start to taper, we'll talk with you about the benefit of doing this. We'll also talk about the risks if you continue your opioids.

## Why should I do this?

It may seem scary at first, but it's possible to safely take less opioids over time. And, you'll still have control of your pain. It's also better for you.

### *Less long-term side effects*

When you take less opioids, you'll have less long-term side effects.

Some of these side effects include:

- more risk that you can overdose
- pain gets worse over time from always taking opioids
- low estrogen or testosterone
- your bones get weak (osteoporosis)
- weak immune system
- wounds don't heal as well
- you feel sedated
- you become addicted
- you're constipated
- you're depressed

### *It's better for your health*

There are many benefits when you taper opioids. Some of these include:

- you can actually manage your pain better
- less visits to the doctor and less co-pays
- no urine drug tests
- less risk of others taking or using your opioids.

## How do I taper?

You and your provider will come up with a plan. The goal is to slowly take less opioids over time.

The plan can include:

- decreasing the strength of your opioids
- decreasing how often you take opioids each month.

### *Other ways to help your pain*

You can also try other ways to help manage your pain while you taper. These might include:

- add in non-opioid pain medicines to your plan
- see a pain specialist
- apply ice or heat to your body
- physical therapy
- acupuncture
- massage
- stretching and more.

*(continued)*

## What if I taper too quickly ?

It's not always easy when you start to take less opioids. It's possible you can have bad side effects. We call this withdrawal. This usually happens when you taper too fast. Some of these include:

- anxiety
- cramps
- diarrhea
- you're very tired or you can't sleep
- you sweat a lot
- your heart rate is high
- you feel sick at your stomach
- you have food cravings
- you're irritable
- you're restless
- you have tremors.

### *How long do these last?*

These usually last 72 hours but can last up to 10 days.

### *Is there anything that can help?*

Yes. There are medicines and drug-free therapies we can give you to help. We can also adjust your dose of opioids if we need to.

If you have withdrawal, please contact us.

We can help you.

## Contact us

We're here for you. If you have questions, please call your provider or send them a message in My Health at Vanderbilt.