

Language for Health Care Providers to Communicate with Patients about the Risks Associated with Chronic Opioid Therapy

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<p>"Opioid medications can be helpful for pain, but like all medications, they have risks, especially if taken every day for months at a time. If you notice any of the problems described below, tell your doctor right away."</p>	
<p>Tolerance</p>	<p>"Although this medication is likely to relieve your pain at first, after some weeks or months, it may not work as well as it did in the beginning, and you may notice your pain returning."</p>
<p>Opioid-Induced Hyperalgesia</p>	<p>"Some patients who take this medication for months or years find that their pain returns and is more severe than it was before they started the medication. This side-effect is sometimes accompanied by new pain in new parts of the body where they never had pain before."</p>
<p>Dependence and Withdrawal</p>	<p>"Your body may become used to this medication, such that if you suddenly decrease the dose or stop the medication, you may feel sick, like you have a bad case of the flu, including having hot and cold sweats, diarrhea, nausea, and increased pain or achiness throughout your body. This can also occur when you switch from one opioid medication to another, or when you add another medication which reduces the effectiveness of the opioid you are taking."</p>

Addiction	<p>“If you find you are using your medication other than prescribed, such as taking more than prescribed, hoarding the medication and taking a lot at once, or taking the medication to improve mood and energy, rather than pain, these are some signs that you may be getting addicted. Other signs include spending a lot of time and effort trying to get more medication, or getting into trouble at work or in your personal life due to your use of the medication. The higher the dose and the longer you take the opioid medication, the greater the risk of experiencing problems like these.”</p>
Depression	<p>“Prolonged use of this medication can contribute to low mood, including having less interest in activities that you once enjoyed and having less energy to get things done. Sometimes these problems are accompanied by difficulty thinking clearly.”</p>
Disordered Breathing	<p>“This medication can reduce your body’s ability to breathe normally. Breathing problems can even occur at night, when you may experience brief episodes when you stop breathing altogether, called sleep apnea, which can make you tired and sleepy during the day.”</p>
Accidental Overdose	<p>“This medication can cause serious organ damage or death by slowing your heart rate and interfering with your ability to breathe. The higher the dose, the greater this risk of death. The risk also increases when you take the medication in combination with alcohol or medications that also slow heart rate and breathing, for example some medications for anxiety and sleep. I can give you a prescription for Naloxone, to reverse accidental overdose, as a preventive measure, just in case.”</p>

Hormonal Dysregulation	"This medication can cause hormonal changes, such as decreasing testosterone levels, which may lead to sexual dysfunction, infertility, fatigue, bone loss, and weakness."
Cardiovascular Events	"This medication may cause damage to your heart, including heart attack, heart failure, an irregular heartbeat, and premature aging of the vessels which supply your heart with blood, all of which can result in sudden death."
Constipation	"This medication often slows down the speed at which people digest food and the frequency of their bowel movements. Severe constipation which cannot be resolved with the usual remedies can result from using opioid medications. With prolonged use of the medication, blockages of the intestines can sometimes cause holes in the intestinal wall."
Narcotic Bowel Syndrome	"Although this medication is intended to lessen pain, in some cases it can cause severe stomach pain, even when stomach pain was not your original problem."
Fractures	"This medication may make your bones more brittle and more likely to break."
Immunosuppression	"This medication may weaken your body's ability to fight off infection and other forms of disease."