



## **My Child was prescribed a Pain Medication - What Should I Know?**

Commonly prescribed pain medications like Vicodin, Percocet, and Tylenol #3 are opioid-nonopioid combination drugs, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) plus hydrocodone, oxycodone, or codeine. Always ask your provider if the medication prescribed to your child contains an opioid.

### **What is an opioid?**

- Opioids are chemical substances that relieve pain. Prescription opioids are medications that are chemically similar to endorphins which our body makes to relieve pain.
- For most people, when opioids are taken exactly as prescribed, for a short time, they are relatively safe and can reduce pain effectively.
- Dependence, addiction, and overdose are potential risks with prescription opioids.
- Prescription medications are some of the most commonly misused drugs by teens, after tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana.
- Ask that your doctor prescribe the lowest dose and the smallest quantity you may need.

### **What if my teen or a family member has a history of addiction to tobacco, alcohol, or drugs?**

- Teens with a personal or family history of smoking, alcohol or drug abuse may be at a greater risk for misuse or addiction to pain medications.
- Talk to your doctor about the best options for your child given their history.

### **How long should my child take this pain medication?**

- Every child and every situation is different. Before leaving your provider's office, find out when and how to stop using, or taper off your medication.
- Following most procedures, your doctor will check in with you to see how well your child's pain is being managed.

### **How will this medication interact with other medications my child is taking, including recreational drugs or alcohol?**

- Opioids can combine with other drugs and medications (especially alcohol) to cause overdose or even death much quicker than each substance alone. This happens by slowing down the brain and reflexes so much that people stop breathing.
- Medications for anxiety, sleeping problems and seizure are particularly likely to have harmful effects and should be discussed with your doctor.
- Discuss this with your child, and ask your provider in front of your child, or prompt your child to ask the provider themselves when you get a prescription.

### **Are there non-opioid alternatives for pain management?**

- Research shows that ice and a combination of Ibuprofen (Advil) and Acetaminophen (Tylenol) work just as well for minor injuries and teeth extractions as prescription pain medications.

- Some oral surgeons are now using non-opioid alternatives for sedation and post-extraction treatment. Always ask your doctor if these are available and appropriate for your child.

### **Are there alternative non-pharmacological treatments to help with pain?**

- Accept that some pain is ok. If your child is experiencing minimal pain following a procedure, they may not need medication.
- Opioids block the perception of pain but do not act on the cause of the pain. Inflammation is one of the primary causes of pain following a surgery or injury. Ice or gel packs can help reduce swelling and minimize the cause of the pain.
- Distractions, such listening to music, watching movies, playing video games, reading, or spending time with a family pet are all great ways to guide your child's attention away from their pain.
- Try to model a warm, calm approach to managing pain and the emotions that can arise.

### **How do I know if my child's pain is being managed well with non-pharmacological treatments?**

- Use your instincts to determine if your child's pain is well managed. You know your child best.
- Difficulty sleeping, crying, agitation and acting out are all signs that your child's pain is not being managed well.
- Always consult your provider if you have doubts about your child's pain management.

### **How do I safely store this medication at home?**

- Never leave a bottle of prescription pain meds at your child's bedside.
- Always lock up medication and make sure a responsible adult is giving your child the correct amount of medication.
- Keep track of medications by making a list that includes the amount and time given. This will help prevent over medicating, misuse and overdose.
- For more info visit [www.bouldercounty.org/families/addiction/out-of-reach/](http://www.bouldercounty.org/families/addiction/out-of-reach/)

### **What should I do with unused medication?**

- When your child's pain is under control and they no longer need their prescription medication, make sure the remainder is disposed of properly.
- Leftover medications can be misused by family members or stolen by someone visiting your home.
- Never flush unused medications down the toilet.
- Safely dispose of your unused medications by mixing them with coffee grounds or kitty litter and throwing them away, or take them to a take-back location or event.
- Visit <https://www.bouldercounty.org/families/disease/safely-dispose-of-unwanted-medication-and-syringes/>
- Drugstores, like Walgreens, are now selling safe, eco-friendly home drug disposal solutions that neutralize prescription medications.

### **How can I keep my child involved and active while they are recovering from surgery or an injury?**

- Rest is often recommended to help with healing and recovery time.
- When your child's pain is manageable, get back to a normal routine.
- Depression related to injury is common and can sometimes lead to misusing

prescription medications.

- If your child can no longer participate in an activity, make sure they are still attending practices, rehearsals, or study sessions. Their coach, trainer or teacher can assist with progressing activity safely or assisting in their physical therapy.
- This may also be a time to explore other interests.

### **What if I share the medication?**

- The medication prescribed to your child is for that person only. What is safe for one person might lead to an overdose in another.
- Let your child know that giving, sharing or selling prescription medication can harm others, is illegal and can lead to imprisonment and/or fines.

### **What should I do if I am concerned about my child overdosing on their prescription pain medication?**

- When prescription pain medications are taken as prescribed, there is minimal risk of overdose.
- Naloxone, also known as Narcan, is a safe and effective treatment that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose and can be obtained at pharmacies in Colorado without a prescription.
- If you have concerns about accidental overdose, discuss this with your provider or pharmacist.