

# Safe Use of Opioids in Children

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## What are opioids?

Opioids, sometimes referred to as narcotics, are pain relievers that are used to treat your child's moderate to severe pain. Children respond differently to opioids so it is important to be aware of common side effects.

## What are the most common side-effects?

- Constipation
  - A stool softener, such as docusate (Colace<sup>®</sup>, Dulcolax<sup>®</sup>) may help with your child's constipation. You may also discuss other available options with your child's healthcare provider.
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Confusion
- Drowsiness
- Itching

## Are there any serious side-effects?

A more serious side effect of opioids is the risk of respiratory depression. Respiratory depression is often recognized by trouble breathing or a slow breathing rate. It may also include trouble speaking, irritability and confusion. The risk for respiratory depression increases when an opioid is taken with certain medications such as central nervous system (CNS) depressants or with more than one opioid. Please refer to the list below for common CNS depressants as well as medications that contain opioids. If you have any

questions or concerns about your child taking multiple opioids or an opioid with a CNS depressant, please contact your child's doctor.

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### **Common CNS depressants**

- Barbiturates
  - phenobarbital
- benzodiazepines
  - alprazolam (Xanax®)
  - clonazepam (Klonopin®)
  - diazepam (Valium®)
  - lorazepam (Ativan®)
- diphenhydramine (Benadryl®)

### **Medications containing opioids**

- fentanyl (Actiq®, Duragesic®, Fentora®, Onsolis®)
- hydromorphone hydrochloride (Dilaudid®)
- hydrocodone and acetaminophen (Lortab®, Norco®, Vicodin®)
- meperidine hydrochloride (Demerol®)
- methadone hydrochloride (Dolophine®, Methadose®)
- morphine sulfate (Avinza®, Kadian®, MS Contin®, Oramorph SR®, Roxanol®)
- oxycodone (OxyContin®, Roxicodone®)
- oxycodone and acetaminophen (Endocet®, Percocet®, Roxicet®, Roxilox®, Tylox®)
- oxycodone and aspirin (Percodan®, Roxiprin®)
- oxymorphone hydrochloride (Opana®, Opana ER®)
- tramadol hydrochloride (Ultram®) (while not an actual opioid, this drug has opioid-like effects).

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## **Where are the guidelines for safe storage of medications, including opioids?**

- Store medications up and away from the sight and reach of children & pets.
- Keep a rough count of the number of pills you have.
- Store medications in a dry and cool place. Avoid bathroom due to humidity.
- Always put medication away in a safe and secure location (locked cabinet, drawer, or box) to protect your children and prevent inappropriate access by visitors.
- Make sure the childproof cap is fastened securely after every use by listening for the “click” sound.

## **What is the best way to dispose of unused opioid medications?**

Leftover pain medications make tempting targets for theft. They can also be dangerous if children find them. Many communities offer places for you to drop off unused medications. Some states even sponsor special “take-back” events. To find a medication disposal site in your area visit:

<http://disposemy meds.org/> and click on the link to: **Dispose My Meds** to do a search by zipcode. If a take-back program is not available you can do one of the following:

- Mix the medication with coffee grounds or kitty litter, seal the contents in plastic bag and dispose of the bag with your household trash.
- Flush the leftover opioids down the toilet. While flushing is not recommended for most medications, leftover opioids are so risky that it is best to remove them from your house in this way. First, be sure your state or local laws do not prohibit flushing medications.
- Used narcotic patches (e.g. fentanyl patches) should be folded-in (sticky sides should meet) and then flushed down the toilet.

## Where can I find additional information on safe use of opioids?

- Additional information on proper storage of opioids is available at:  
<http://www.upandaway.org/>
- Additional information of safe disposal of opioids is available at:  
<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/> ○ Scroll down and click on Safe Disposal of Medications.  
You may also call the FDA at 1-888-463-6332.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

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