

Narcotic (Opioid) Informational Handout

This handout is provided to all patients in regards to expectations after surgery, side effects of narcotic medications, and the goals of pain management in the post-operative period.

While minimizing discomfort remains an important goal of orthopaedic care, **great caution should be using when dealing with opioid medication.** Orthopaedic surgeons and all health care professionals are working together to improve pain management with the ultimate goal of reducing opioid use and misuse and improving patient outcomes and care.

Narcotic Medication Facts:

- Numerous studies have exposed the addictive dangers and devastating consequences of opioid misuse.
- Millions of Americans are dependent on or addicted to prescription painkillers such as codeine, oxycodone (Percocet), hydrocodone (Vicodin), hydromorphone (Dilaudid), tramadol, or morphine.
- According to the US Department of Health and Human Services:
 - More people died from drug overdoses in 2014 than any year on record with more than 60% of those involving narcotics.
 - Since 1999 the rate of overdose deaths involving opioids have quadrupled.
 - Every day, 78 people die from an opioid related overdose.
 - There are more deaths from prescription narcotics than those of heroin or cocaine.
- Dependence to narcotic medications can occur at normal prescribed doses.

How to safely and effectively manage pain after Surgery:

- **Expect to have some pain** after surgery. The first few days after surgery are typically the worst and subside over the following week to two weeks. Pain and discomfort are part of the normal healing process and will improve day to day.
- Reducing pain levels to a safe level is a priority for all of your caregivers.
- Oral narcotic medicines are generally prescribed after surgery to treat post-operative pain. They are not as effective for treating chronic pain and can be harmful to long-term health.
- Many injuries and conditions do not require prescription medication for pain relief:
 - Splints, Icing on the affected side, and non-opioid pain medications (acetaminophen or ibuprofen) are often enough to manage pain.
 - Positive coping strategies, peace of mind, and relaxation can have powerful effects on your comfort and pain level. Studies have shown that **patients who are prepared to experience pain after surgery are more likely to feel less pain and have a more positive feeling that their recovery is on track.** Support from family and friends, as well as entertainment and laughter can help during times of discomfort.
- Follow the pain relief plan outlined by your doctor and stick to it.

- Your doctor can specify an appropriate plan to minimize pain, which often includes a combination of a small amount of opioids, over the counter medications, and icing.
- Your doctor can tell you how much is too much pain and how to know, in the rare instances when a problem has occurred.
- **When prescribed opioids, try to take as little as possible and stop taking them as soon as possible.**
 - Make sure to take the over the counter medications such as Tylenol (acetaminophen) and Advil (ibuprofen) soon after surgery. *Do not take Tylenol if you are prescribed Percocet or Vicodin as they contain Tylenol as well and, in large doses, can cause serious side effects.* In addition, if you are taking blood thinners, please ask about taking ibuprofen, Aleve, or aspirin.
 - You may take up to 1000mg of Tylenol every six hours or two regular strength tablets every 4 hours. Never take more than 4000mg of Tylenol daily.
 - Alternate the Tylenol with ibuprofen so that you're taking one of the other every 3 hours.
- **Only take opioids as prescribed.**
 - Do not take more than instructed.
 - Do not take someone else's medication or give it to someone else.
 - Do not combine with alcohol or anxiety medications.
 - Do not take opioids to treat anxiety or to feel good.
- **Store and dispose of opioids safely.**
 - Pain relievers are a leading cause of poisoning of children if left unsecured, so please hide or lock up to avoid access by anyone else.
 - Keep prescription medication in original packaging so it is clear for whom they were prescribed and directions for use.
 - Place unused opioids in disposal unit in a pharmacy or police station.
 - To find a disposal site please visit:
[U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's Controlled Substance Public Disposal Locations.](#)

Key terms:

Narcotics = Opioids
 Tylenol = Acetaminophen
 Advil = Ibuprofen
 Percocet and Vicodin both contain Tylenol

Common Adverse Reactions to Opioids:

- Sleepiness
- Nausea and vomiting,
- Itching
- Decreased breathing
- Constipation