



Know the risks of opioid painkillers

The United States faces a national health care crisis involving the use and abuse of opioid painkillers. An estimated 4.5 million Americans have a substance use disorder related to prescription painkillers, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). And the rate of overdose deaths is now about one every 16 minutes, according to national estimates.

A key driver of these alarming statistics is chronic pain related to a wide variety of health conditions. Studies show about 40 percent of U.S. adults, and up to 80 percent of military veterans returning from active duty suffer from some form of chronic pain. And pain is the No. 1 reason people seek health care services, according to the American Chronic Pain Association.

Opioid medications may be a safe way to treat the short- or long-term symptoms of pain, if used correctly. They also can lead to addiction for those who misuse such drugs or fail to follow their doctor's instructions.

Here are eight guiding principles from the American Academy of Pain Medicine for taking opioid medications safely:

1. Never take an opioid pain medication that is not prescribed to you
2. Never adjust your own doses
3. Never mix with alcohol
4. Taking sleep aids or anti-anxiety medications together with opioid pain medication can be dangerous
5. Always tell your health care provider about all medications you are taking from any source
6. Keep track of when you take all medications
7. Keep your medications locked in a safe place
8. Dispose of any unused medications

[Click here](#) to download UMR's flyer on recognizing and preventing opioid overuse to help spread the word to your employees. Your members can find more information on the effects of [opioid use and abuse](#) in the Health Education Library on umr.com.