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Nebraska Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program

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Opioid Use in Older Adults: A Patient Guide

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As many as **1 in 4** people*
receiving prescription opioids
long-term in a primary care setting
struggles with addiction.

*Findings from one study

Opioid use in older adults is associated with:

- 💊 Memory problems
- 💊 Risk of car accidents
- 💊 Confusion
- 💊 Heart problems
- 💊 Risk of fractures
- 💊 Pneumonia

The use of prescription opioids can have a number of side effects, even when taken as directed:

- 💊 Tolerance – meaning you might need to take more of a medication for the same pain relief
- 💊 Physical dependence – meaning you have symptoms of withdrawal when a medication is stopped
- 💊 Increased sensitivity to pain
- 💊 Constipation
- 💊 Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth
- 💊 Sleepiness and dizziness
- 💊 Confusion
- 💊 Depression
- 💊 Low levels of testosterone that can result in lower sex drive, energy and strength
- 💊 Itching and sweating

There is little evidence for using opioids long-term to treat pain.

For patients with chronic non-cancer pain, there is no research showing that opioids improve physical activity, function, sleep, mood or quality of life.

Opioid withdrawal can happen when someone physically dependent on opioids suddenly reduces or stops taking opioids. Symptoms can include:

- 💊 Increased heart rate
- 💊 Runny nose or tearing
- 💊 GI upset
- 💊 Yawning
- 💊 Sweating
- 💊 Anxiety or irritability
- 💊 Restlessness
- 💊 Tremor
- 💊 Increased pupil size
- 💊 Gooseflesh skin
- 💊 Bone or joint aches

“I would like to cut back on my opioid use but I don’t know how...”

- 💊 Talk to your doctor about your concerns
- 💊 There are resources available to help
- 💊 Your doctor can refer you to:
 - ➔ Addiction Services Outpatient Clinic
 - ➔ Pain Management Program
 - ➔ Chronic Pain Clinic
 - ➔ Clinic Pharmacist