

# Know the Facts about Opioids

## including Prescription Medicine

### What are opioids?

- Opioids are prescribed for pain. Examples are hydrocodone, oxycodone, codeine, and fentanyl.
- Heroin is an illegal opioid made from the opium poppy plant.
- Opioids come in different forms and can be swallowed, injected, smoked, or snorted.

### Risks of opioid use

#### Short Term

- Overdose means taking more of an opioid than your body can handle. Signs of an overdose are small pupils, slowed breathing, cold clammy skin, and unconsciousness. You can stop breathing and die.
- Use can impair learning and ability to drive.

#### Long Term

- Tolerance means needing more opioids to get the same feeling.
- Opioids can be addictive for many people.
- Withdrawal symptoms are aches, sweating, nausea, pain, vomiting, chills, and trouble sleeping.
- Long-term use can lead to an increase in pain.

### Using opioids with other substances

- Opioids shouldn't be mixed with other drugs, especially depressants like alcohol, benzodiazepines, and sleeping medications. This greatly increases the risk of overdose and death.
- Mixing cocaine with heroin, called speedballing, also increases the risk of overdose.
- Heroin is sometimes mixed with fentanyl or carfentanil, very powerful opioids that cause overdose and death.

### Do not borrow or share opioids

- Taking opioids that are not prescribed to you is dangerous, and can cause or worsen health problems.
- Pills may look the same but could be different medicines, or have different amounts in each pill. Keep opioids locked up, out of reach of children and teenagers. Most misused medication was taken from someone with a prescription.
- Do not keep extra opioids. Contact your local pharmacy or law enforcement for take-back programs or how to safely destroy.

### Opioids and pregnancy

- Use during pregnancy can lead to serious complications but if you are pregnant, do not stop taking opioids without help from a qualified professional.

### Important steps to take if using opioids

- Until you know how opioids affects you, do not use heavy machinery, operate a car, work in unprotected heights, or be responsible for a person who is unable to care for themselves.
- Tell someone you are taking opioids. They should call 911 if you have slowed breathing, cold, clammy skin, or become unconscious.
- Ask your provider if naloxone is something you should have.
- If you need help with pain management, or have health concerns, talk with your healthcare provider. There are other ways to treat pain.

### Tips for making a change

#### Getting started.

- Do not stop taking your opioid medicine suddenly. Lowering your dose too quickly can be dangerous.
- Withdrawal symptoms may happen when decreasing use. Medical providers and addiction treatment programs can help decrease safely and help with uncomfortable symptoms.

#### Know your options.

- *Treatment.* Treatment can include medications, counseling, or a combination. Medications can be provided by a treatment center (inpatient or outpatient) or provider office.
- *Medications.* Medications include methadone, buprenorphine (Suboxone), and naltrexone. They help manage cravings and withdrawal symptoms, and are used for long-term recovery.
- *Counseling.* Counseling options include cognitive behavioral therapy and motivational interviewing.
- *Peer support groups and recovery supports* are important to help people stay in recovery.

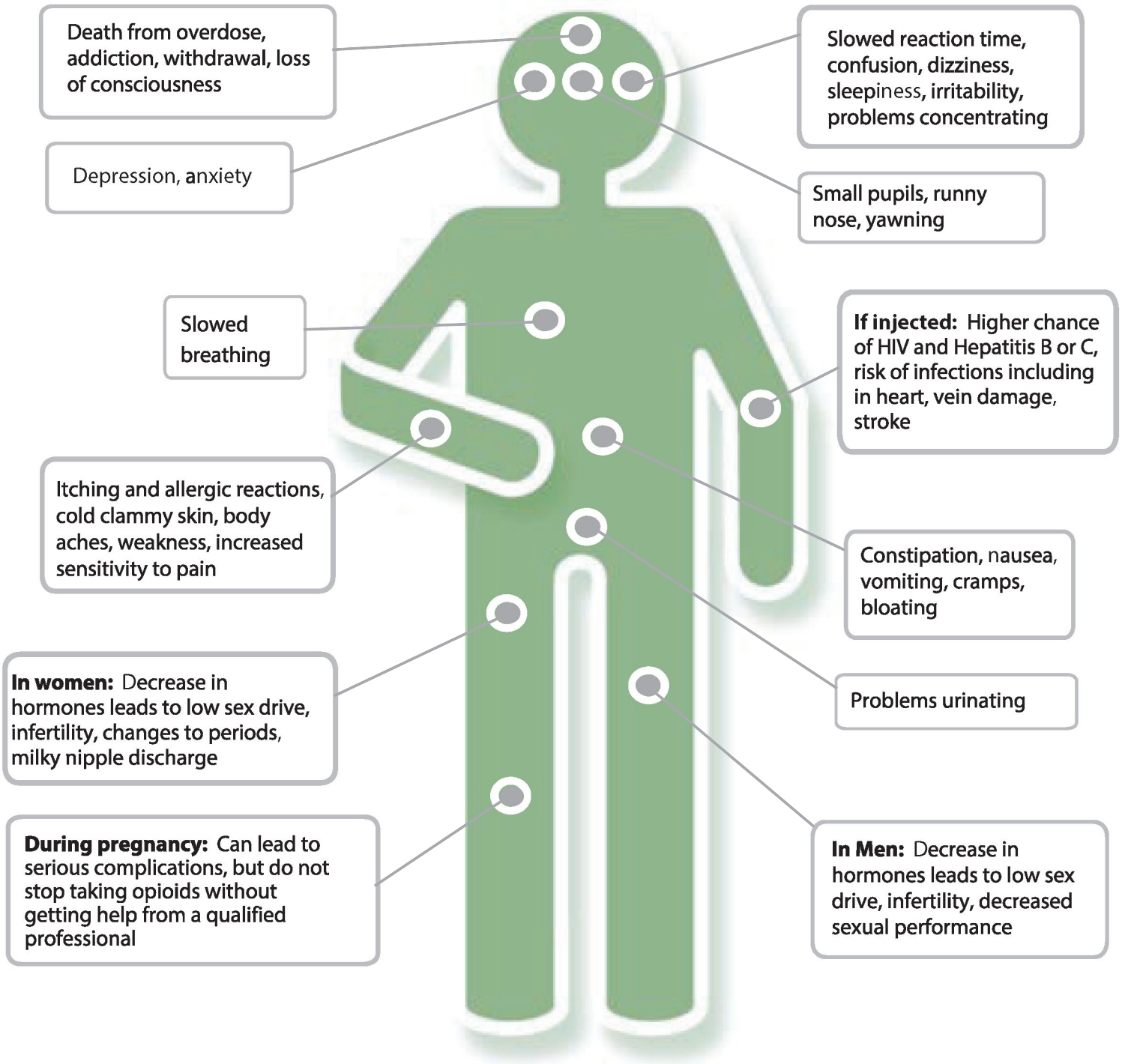
#### Have naloxone in case of overdose.

- Naloxone is a life-saving tool for people who use opioids. Naloxone prevents people from dying from an overdose by returning breathing to normal. It may be available through your healthcare provider, pharmacy, or needle exchange program.

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### Effects on the Body



Mid-America (HHS Region 7)

**ATTC**

Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration