Ten Things Women Should Know About Prescription Opioids

Whether you are managing post-surgery pain, chronic pain or another health challenge, it is important to know about the prescriptions you may be given to manage your discomfort. Here are 10 things you should know when a healthcare professional prescribes you opioids.

1. Prescription opioids are medications prescribed by healthcare providers to reduce pain.

2. Prescription opioids may be prescribed to treat moderate to severe pain for health conditions that cause acute or chronic discomfort, as well as for pain following surgery or injury.

3. Common prescription opioids include:
   - Oxycodone
   - Hydrocodone
   - Methadone
   - Codeine
   - Morphine
   - Oxymorphone
   - Fentanyl

4. Although prescription opioids can be effective in relieving pain, they come with serious risks and side effects, including the potential for misuse, abuse and overdose.

5. The most common prescription opioids involved in deaths from overdose are methadone, oxycodone and hydrocodone.¹

6. Risk factors for overdosing include:
   - Using opioids with other medications, drugs or alcohol
   - Taking more than prescribed
   - Taking a high daily dose of opioids
   - Certain conditions such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, HIV, sleep apnea, or liver or lung disease
   - Pregnancy
   - Older age
   - History of substance abuse

7. Women who have a hard time stopping the use of opioids may have opioid use disorder.

8. For some women, opioids are necessary to relieve severe pain. For other women, alternative options — such as over-the-counter pain medications (acetaminophen or ibuprofen), therapeutic exercise, physical therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness meditation, biofeedback, acupuncture and massage — may be effective at reducing pain.

9. Women who are seeking ways to manage pain safely and effectively should understand the potential benefits and risks of taking opioids and discuss options with their healthcare provider that may have fewer risks and side effects.

10. Taking opioids during pregnancy may cause a newborn baby to have withdrawal symptoms for a few days or weeks. A healthcare provider can help identify symptoms and recommend steps, such as swaddling and breastfeeding, to provide relief for the child.