



A Guide to Managing Pain After Surgery



Pain after surgery is normal and should be expected. In fact, pain is a part of the recovery process. There are many ways that pain is treated and healthcare providers often develop a multimodal pain management plan for patients, which includes multiple medications, activities and techniques.

In some situations, patients are prescribed opioids as part of their treatment plan after surgery. Opioids include prescription drugs for treating pain — such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, oxymorphone, codeine, morphine, methadone and fentanyl — and should be taken as directed by a provider.

As pain begins to decrease, it is important for patients to understand when they should stop taking prescription opioids. In the days following surgery, patients should strive to be able to manage their pain and capable of looking after themselves by completing common daily tasks.

The below guide is intended to help to manage pain after surgery, including questions you can ask your doctor before and after the procedure.



Before Surgery

Before surgery, you should talk to your healthcare provider about your medical history, including any medications such as prescription and over-the-counter pain relievers that you have taken in the past. This information will help your doctor know how best to work with you after the procedure in order to properly manage your pain.

Questions to ask your healthcare provider before the operation:

- What can I do after surgery to help control my pain?
- What are my non-opioid alternatives for treating pain, and would they work for me?



After Surgery

Prescription opioids and other medications will not completely take away the pain. By changing your opioid medication to a non-opioid alternative, you are working to control the pain with an alternative treatment that may have fewer side effects.

Prescription opioids should not be used for very long because they have many adverse consequences. Potential side effects include nausea, vomiting and dry mouth, sleepiness and dizziness, confusion, depression, itching and sweating, tolerance and dependence.



Securely Store Prescription Opioids

Safe storage is an important part of reducing abuse and misuse of prescription opioids. Opioid medications should be kept in a secure, locked location out of the reach of family members or guests.

It is also very important that you never share your prescribed opioid medication with other people.



Dispose of Opioids Once You No Longer Need Them

The majority of patients who are prescribed opioids do not finish their entire prescription. Safe disposal can help prevent misuse and is an important part of addressing the prescription opioid epidemic.

Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about what to do with your leftover pills, including if they offer on-site medicine drop-off boxes, mail-back programs or at home disposal solutions. Many pharmacies and police departments have drop-off boxes to safely dispose of unused medicine.

During the National Prescription Drug Take Back Days in April and October, you can dispose of medicines at secure locations in your community.

Allied Against Opioid Abuse has also created an online disposal tool with information about state and national disposal programs.

Visit www.againstopioidabuse.org/disposal for more information.



Talk to Your Healthcare Provider About Any Questions

Please talk to your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns with the opioid medication you have been prescribed.