

Opiate Pain Medications

Opiate refers to medications in the same chemical family as morphine. These medications have been used as pain relievers for thousands of years and are a mainstay of treatment of severe pain today.

Commonly used opiate medications include morphine (MS Contin, Kadian, Avinza), oxycodone (Oxycontin, Percocet), fentanyl (Duragesic patch, Actiq), methadone, hydrocodone (Vicodin, Norco), numorphan, dilaudid, and codeine.

We now know that these medications can be taken safely under Physician supervision long-term. However, several issues arise with long term use of *opiates*.

These medications all have similar side-effect profiles, including possible nausea, constipation, sedation, short term memory alteration, and effects on the endocrine system. They are powerful medications. They should be taken in the minimum doses necessary and stored in a secure location out of reach of children and others.

In order to comply with regulations and provide for safety, patients receiving these medications must keep regular follow-up appointments. Patients must not receive this type of medications from another Physician or Clinician without our explicit knowledge. For patient safety, they must take them specifically as prescribed. In addition, patients must not receive these types of medications from nor share them with any friends or family members, even with the best of intentions.

California has a law enabling the prescription of medical marijuana under certain medical circumstances. However, the Federal Government does not recognize this law. The Federal Government specifically prohibits Physicians from prescribing opiates to patients using marijuana, even if the latter is prescribed by a California Physician.

Therefore, we cannot prescribe pain medications for patients using marijuana, even if it is under a Physician's prescription. Certainly, we will not prescribe pain medications for any individual using illicit drugs or medications.

Issues relating to job performance, driving an automobile, and personal activities are determined on a patient-by-patient basis. Most patients on modest, effective long-term opiates perform job duties and drive without impairment.

While very effective, opiate pain medications should be used in the minimal dose necessary for pain relief. They should also be used under close supervision of a Physician and with attention to other methods of pain relief to minimize their use.