

OXYCONTIN ADDICTION, ABUSE, AND SYMPTOMS

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OxyContin is the brand name of a controlled-release formula of [oxycodone](#), an opioid-based pain reliever that ranked as the 54th most prescribed medication in the United States in 2016. More than 14.5 million prescriptions were issued that year. A 2010 survey by the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that approximately [1 in 20 high school seniors](#) reported the nonmedical use or abuse of OxyContin, making it one of the most commonly abused drugs by adolescents.

Available in a pill or caplet, OxyContin is an oral medication that provides a slow, steady release of an [opioid analgesic](#). It's considered a narcotic pain reliever and isn't intended for occasional or as-needed use for mild pain that will go away in a few days. The primary purpose of OxyContin is to help relieve severe ongoing pain, such as in the [treatment of cancer patients](#).

OxyContin works in the brain, [changing how your body feels](#) Rehab in Houston, a euphoric feeling that users compare to the high received from heroin. According to the [U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration](#), people have been abusing oxycodone for more than 30 years, but there's been a distinct escalation of abuse since the introduction of OxyContin in 1996. OxyContin abusers may [snort or inject it](#) to achieve a quicker high, which increases the risk for serious medical problems, including overdose.

Some people [develop a tolerance](#) to the opioid component in OxyContin, causing them to take higher and/or more frequent doses of the drug to get the desired effect. Long-term use or abuse of OxyContin puts you at risk of physical dependence, which can lead to addiction with severe [withdrawal symptoms](#) likely. OxyContin abuse may cause kidney failure, liver damage, heart disease, osteoporosis, anxiety, and depression.

According to Jeremy Barnett, a Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor, "One of the dangers surrounding painkiller use – like OxyContin – is that the concept of physiological tolerance is not universal knowledge. Many tragic overdoses occur unexpectedly after drug users have accumulated some abstinence, either on one's own or through formal treatment. When users relapse, they resume at a dosage that they remember using before treatment that was a sufficient amount to result in a high, but without considering that their bodies' tolerance level have officially reset after a period of abstinence."

This guide explains the effects, trends, and dangers of OxyContin use, as well as an unbiased analysis of the medicinal and behavioral treatment methods for OxyContin addiction based on current research and publicly available statistics. In some cases, usage statistics are derived from generic prescription pain reliever use, which includes oxycodone or all opioid-based pain relievers.

Primary OxyContin Dangers

- **Addictiveness:** Opioids, as found in OxyContin, are considered [highly addictive](#), because they cause changes in the brain that are the underlying [cause of dependence](#). Physical dependence can lead to addiction with severe withdrawal symptoms that make it difficult to kick the habit. A comprehensive study by [Nutt et al.](#) in 2007 evaluated the addictive potential of 20 substances based on physical dependence, psychological dependence, and pleasure. While OxyContin and prescription opioids, in general, weren't included, [heroin, the illicit equivalent](#), was, and is ranked highest of all substances, with a 3 out of 3 in every category.
- **Risk of overdose:** The risk of OxyContin overdose increases when you take more than you're prescribed just to get high or sometimes even when you simply take an extra dose by mistake. Mixing opioids with other medications, alcohol, or illicit drugs can also increase [overdose risks](#). Opioids affect the area of the brain that regulates breathing, so taking too much can slow or stop breathing, potentially causing death. Mixing opioids with certain medicines intended to treat anxiety can cause a fatal overdose.
- **Unintended side effects:** OxyContin use commonly causes constipation, drowsiness, weakness, and a relaxed, calm feeling. [Unintended side effects](#) include vomiting, headache, stomach pain, dry mouth, and mood changes. [Less common side effects](#) include chills, cold sweats, difficulty breathing, chest tightness, faintness, confusion, and twitching.
- **Legal risks:** OxyContin is a [Schedule II](#) controlled substance. If you obtain the substance legally with a legitimate prescription, you're exempt from prosecution under the law. However, possession of OxyContin without a valid

prescription is a criminal offense. A first offense is generally considered a misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in prison and/or a \$1,000 fine. Subsequent offenses include higher fines and lengthier prison sentences.

OxyContin Background Information

Derived From	Semisynthetic opioids derived from the opium poppy plant or man-made in a lab
Ways Used	Orally, crushed and snorted , diluted with water and injected
Scientific Name	OxyContin
Slang/Street Names for OxyContin	Oxy, O.C., Oxycet, OxyCotton, Ozone, Roxy, 30s, Berries, Blues, Blueberries, Hillbilly Heroin
How Long in Bodily System	OxyContin has a half-life of 4.5 hours , and the drug's action is effectively eliminated from the bloodstream in 22.5 hours. However, it can be detected in a urine test up to four days after the last dose was taken.
Punitive Legal Measures: Using/Possession	As a Schedule II controlled substance , it's illegal to possess OxyContin without a doctor's prescription. Punitive legal measures vary from state to state and are often based on how much you have in your possession. However, the first offense of possession is usually a misdemeanor with legal ramifications, including up to \$1,000 in fines and up to one year in prison. Subsequent offenses generally result in higher fines and increased jail time.
Punitive Legal Measures: Selling/Distributing	Possessing large amounts of OxyContin displays an intent to sell or distribute, which can be a felony. Trafficking any Schedule II substance is subject to federal penalties, including fines of \$1 million to \$5 million and up to 20 years in prison.
DEA Drug Rating	Schedule II

[Back to top](#) ^

II. Signs of Abuse

Behavioral Symptoms of OxyContin Usage and Abuse

How OxyContin affects the brain

Opioids work by binding to specific [receptors in your brain](#) and mimic the effects of naturally occurring pain-relieving chemicals in your body. By binding with these receptors, OxyContin effectively blocks your perception of pain. Because it physically changes how your body feels and responds to pain, it's a powerful analgesic for chronic pain sufferers, but these changes can also make your body physically dependent on the drug.

Besides blocking pain, the most common [effects OxyContin has on the brain](#) are euphoria and feelings of relaxation, which is why there's a high potential for abuse. Some people develop a [tolerance to OxyContin](#), which may lead them to take higher and/or more frequent doses to feel pain relief and euphoria or reduce symptoms of withdrawal.

Behavioral signs of OxyContin usage and abuse

Once you've developed a tolerance and begin taking more OxyContin than prescribed, you're at a high risk of developing a pain reliever use disorder. However, some people become addicted even when taking the drug exactly [as prescribed](#). According to the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, approximately [1.7 million people](#) aged 12 and over had a pain reliever use disorder.

OxyContin abuse can lead to behavioral changes, including increased use, health problems, physical withdrawals, and failure to meet significant responsibilities at school, work, and home. While [behavioral symptoms of OxyContin abuse](#) vary from one person to another, some people who can't locate enough of the drug through legal prescriptions may turn to risky behaviors, such as borrowing or stealing pills from family and friends, forging prescriptions, or even robbing pharmacies. This preoccupation with obtaining and using OxyContin can also lead to isolation from loved ones, neglecting personal hygiene, and various legal and financial problems.

For some people, OxyContin can also be a [gateway to illicit drug use](#), because it affects the body in a way similar to heroin. Individuals addicted to OxyContin may turn to heroin if they can't obtain a prescription, because they may be able to find heroin on the street more easily than OxyContin. In 2011, the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality estimated that [4% to 6%](#) of people who misused prescription opioids switched to heroin, and about 80% of heroin users initially misused prescription opioids.

Physical Symptoms of OxyContin Abuse

How OxyContin affects the body

OxyContin provides pain relief by blocking pain messages to the brain and causes feelings of euphoria by acting on the reward center in the brain. However, it can also affect your body in negative ways, especially if it's abused. Some [negative effects on the body](#) include constipation, stomach pain, slowed respiration, slowed heart rate, heart palpitations, and tremors.

Early physical effects of OxyContin

Because OxyContin is an extended-release form of oxycodone, it's designed to slowly release the medication into your system over time. Therefore, when you first start taking OxyContin, it may not begin relieving your pain for two to four hours. It typically reaches its peak effect in [15 to 30 hours](#) but will continue to work for a few days to provide long-acting, steady pain relief.

This table illustrates the possible short-term physical effects associated with OxyContin.

	Short-term Physical Symptoms
Initial (direct effects of drug, 60 minutes or more)	Nausea Vomiting Sweating Constriction of pupils
Lingering (within 2 to 4 hours of taking the drug)	Pain relief Feelings of euphoria or pleasure Delayed reactions Drowsiness Dizziness Weakness Jitters Heart palpitations
Post-Use (several hours to days after use)	Nausea Vomiting Constipation Difficulty urinating Abdominal pain Low blood pressure Slowed breathing Sleepiness Loss of appetite Cravings Higher sensitivity to pain

Severe and long-term physical effects of OxyContin

Chronic OxyContin users may develop a tolerance to the drug and begin taking higher-than prescribed amounts and more frequent doses to experience the same pain-relieving and euphoric effect they crave. This can lead to severe complications and potentially dangerous long-term physical effects on your body. These effects can also be compounded when abusing OxyContin or combining it with other substances.

Because OxyContin slowly releases throughout the day, some people may seek ways to make the drug take effect sooner by overriding the extended-release mechanism. This may include chewing the pill or crushing and snorting it, which puts the drug into your system quicker, allowing you to experience the effects immediately. Some people may also crush the pill, dilute it with water, and [inject it](#) to introduce it into the bloodstream as quickly as possible. The likelihood of developing an OxyContin addiction is significantly higher when someone takes the drug in ways other than prescribed.

[Mixing OxyContin with alcohol](#) can create more severe and possibly life-threatening effects. Since both substances are a depressant, combining the two can severely impact your respiratory and cardiovascular functions. Taking oxycodone together with benzodiazepines or [drugs that affect the nervous system](#) may cause severe breathing problems, drowsiness, coma, or death. [Taking other medications](#) that cause drowsiness or breathing problems while taking OxyContin, such as sleeping pills, anti-anxiety medication, muscle relaxants, cough relievers with codeine or hydrocodone, or other opioid-based drugs, can also put you at a higher risk for serious side effects.

This table illustrates the possible long-term physical effects associated with OxyContin.

	Long-term Physical Symptoms
Casual	Constipation Nausea and vomiting Stomach pain Loss of appetite Sleepiness Dizziness Weakness Headache Dry mouth Sweating Decreased ability to feel pain Feelings of euphoria and well-being
Chronic <i>Including all the above effects for casual use</i>	Severe Constipation Persistent vomiting Difficulty urinating Muscle spasms Jerky movements Slowed heart rate Slowed respiration

- Low blood pressure
- Hallucinations
- Worsening of mental health illnesses
- Heart attack and other cardiovascular issues
- Liver damage
- Kidney damage
- Coma
- Death

Withdrawal

- Flu-like symptoms
- Fever
- Chills
- Cold sweats
- Muscular weakness
- Increased pain sensitivity
- Muscle and bone pain
- Insomnia
- Abdominal cramping
- Lack of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Increased agitation
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Panic attacks
- Depression

Further Resources

Both the [National Institute of Drug Abuse](#) and the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) offer in-depth information on both the symptoms and treatment of prescription opioid addiction.

[Back to top](#) 

III. OxyContin Usage

Global prescription opioid usage has increased with prevalence remaining in North America

An estimated [53 million people worldwide](#) used opioids at least once during 2017, according to data collected by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in the 2019 World Drug Report. This number represented 1.1% of the global population ages 15 to 64. Half the people who reported opioid use also reported using opiates, including heroin and opium, over the past year.

One-quarter of the world's opioids users between 15 and 64 resided in North America, giving it the highest prevalence of nonmedical opioid users worldwide. Pharmaceutical opioids remain the biggest concern in North America, including nonmedical use of oxycodone. While the new abuse-deterrent formula of OxyContin prevented it from being crushed to cut down on abuse, even if only a small portion of people switch to heroin, it translates to a much larger number of people using this illicit alternative.

Pharmaceutical Opioid Use Throughout the World

	Highest	Second	Third
Regions with the Highest Number of Pharmaceutical Opioids Users	North America (including Mexico)	Australia and New Zealand	Asia and Oceania
Countries with the Largest Availability of Pharmaceutical Opioids for Medical Use (daily dose per million people), Average over 2015-2017	North America (30,814)	Oceania (12,563)	Europe (8,812)

**This table includes data from users of pharmaceutical opioids, including substances that include oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, and tramadol.*

Source: [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – 2019 World Drug Report, Booklet 3](#)

OxyContin Usage Demographics in the U.S.

Prescription opioid misuse remains high in the U.S. among all age groups

According to the [2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), 3.6% of the population misused prescription pain relievers in the United States over the past year. This made misuse of prescription pain relievers second only to marijuana as the most common form of illicit drug use. The most commonly misused prescription pain relievers were products containing hydrocodone, but an estimated 3.4 million people ages 12 or older misused products containing oxycodone. This number represented 1.2% of the population and ranked it as the second most misused prescription pain reliever that year.

Because OxyContin is an opioid-based substance, it's also included in the estimation of opioid misuse, which included people who used heroin or misused prescription pain relievers. An estimated 10.3 million people ages 12 or older misused opioids in 2018, which included 9.9 million people who misused prescription pain relievers and 808,000

people who used heroin. Of these people, an estimated 2 million had an opioid use disorder, including 1.7 million people with a prescription pain reliever use disorder and 0.5 million people with a heroin use disorder.

Demographics of Prescription OxyContin Usage

	Past Year (2018)	Lifetime
8th grade (14-15 yo)	N/A	N/A
10th grade (15-16 yo)	N/A	N/A
12th grade (17-18 yo)	3.4%	6%

Data includes narcotics other than heroin, such as oxycodone, morphine, hydrocodone, and codeine.

Source: [2015-2018 Monitoring the Future Study: Trends in Prevalence](#) ✓

[Back to top](#) ^

IV. How to Find Help

Some people taking an opioid pain reliever for [two weeks or less](#) may not develop a dependence that will cause withdrawal if they stop taking it. However, it's possible, depending on the dosage levels. People who've been taking opioids long-term, generally six months or longer, will need to taper their usage to manage withdrawal symptoms.

Tapering is a multistep process that slowly decreases the amount of OxyContin a person takes. While fast tapering is an option to quickly reduce the amount of opioid use over a few days or weeks, it usually causes severe withdrawal symptoms and close monitoring is required. A slow tapering program takes several weeks or even months to keep withdrawal symptoms and the potential of relapse at a minimum. To learn more about the treatment process, read the [OxyContin rehabilitation guide](#), which provides a comprehensive resource for starting treatment.

Staging an Intervention

If you have a loved one who's struggling with addiction, staging an intervention is often the first necessary step towards sobriety, but it's important to be strategic and loving in your approach. Even the most well-meaning of interventions can have a negative effect if they aren't handled correctly.

5 Tips for Staging an Intervention

1. Don't Do It Alone. A professional interventionist is always the most qualified to guide a successful intervention. Also, rely on non-addict family and friends – especially those who have a close relationship with you or the addict.

2. Research Ahead of Time. It's best to do plenty of research ahead of time to gather insight on the addiction and how it affects the addict. Also, be prepared with local resources for getting help.

3. Write Out Your Statement. During the actual intervention, emotions will likely be running high, so it's best to have a statement of how the person's addiction has impacted you and your relationship with him or her. These statements should be honest, yet written from a place of love – no personal attacks.

4. Offer Help. It's important for everyone attending the intervention to offer tangible help and support as the person works through detox and rehabilitation.

5. Set Boundaries. If the person refuses to seek help and take the next steps outlined, it's important that they understand that everyone present will end codependence and enabling behaviors.
