

# MELOXICAM ADDICTION AND ABUSE

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Meloxicam is a generic version of Mobic, a high-dose, long-acting nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug, or NSAID. This is a relatively new NSAID that works by preventing the release of inflammatory substances in the joints. Meloxicam requires a prescription and was approved in 2000 for use in the United States. There are currently more than 9 million prescriptions of meloxicam filled annually.

Like other prescription NSAIDs, meloxicam is used to relieve pain and inflammation temporarily and helps manage various debilitating conditions. Meloxicam has been prescribed for chronic osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and juvenile rheumatoid arthritis in adolescents and adults and secondary use in dogs and cats. Although it's a strong painkiller, it doesn't contain opioids, but some people abuse it because they assume it does.

Meloxicam isn't a narcotic and doesn't produce a euphoric feeling like opioids. Because it doesn't act on the brain, it's not physically addictive. However, people may abuse or misuse meloxicam while trying to reduce chronic pain and develop a psychological dependence that gives them the perception that they can't function without it. Abusing meloxicam can damage the liver and increase the risk of serious stomach problems, heart attack, and stroke.

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## I. The Basics

This guide explains the effects and dangers of meloxicam use, as well as treatment methods for meloxicam addiction based on current research and publicly available statistics. In some cases, usage statistics are derived from general prescription painkiller use, which includes those that contain opioids.

### Primary Meloxicam Dangers

- Addictiveness:** The addictive potential of meloxicam is virtually nonexistent because it doesn't cause the changes in the brain or feelings of euphoria that occur with opioid-based pain relievers. Because meloxicam is a nonnarcotic analgesic, it offers a pain relief alternative without the risk of addiction. However, some patients have demonstrated a risk for developing psychological dependence on the drug, especially those who've displayed risk factors for substance abuse.
- Risk of overdose:** Although meloxicam doesn't produce a euphoric high, there's still the possibility of overdose. However, the Food and Drug Administration reports limited experience with meloxicam overdose, with only four cases reported. These were individuals who took six to 11 times more than the highest recommended dose, and all four recovered. Symptoms following NSAID overdose include nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, lethargy, gas, bloating, and heartburn. Meloxicam overdose can also cause slow or fast heartbeat, severe stomach pain, seizures, pain in the chest or throat, swelling around the face and eyes, and blue lips, skin, or fingernails. All of these overdose symptoms are usually reversible with supportive care, but severe poisoning can cause acute renal failure, liver dysfunction, slowed breathing, coma, and cardiac arrest.
- Unintended side effects:** Common side effects include gas, indigestion, heartburn, constipation, diarrhea, upset stomach, nausea, abdominal pain, and dizziness. Prolonged use can also lead to stomach problems and bleeding in the stomach or digestive tract.
- Legal risks:** Meloxicam isn't considered a controlled substance by the Drug Enforcement Administration, and it doesn't appear on the DEA's Schedules I through V, so federal penalties in this aspect don't apply. However, it's illegal to possess or use prescription drugs without a valid prescription, so there may be some legal ramifications that vary between states.

### Meloxicam Background Information

Derived From	<u>Manufactured drug</u> that's a benzothiazine and thiazole derivative and acts as an NSAID and cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) inhibitor
Ways Used	Ingested by tablet or capsule
Scientific Name	Meloxicam / 4-hydroxy-2-methyl-N-(5-methyl-1,3-thiazol-2-yl)-1,1-dioxo-1,6,2-benzothiazine-3-carboxamide
Slang/Street Names for Meloxicam	None
How Long in Bodily System	Half-life: <u>15-20 hours</u> The drug leaves the bloodstream entirely within <u>3 to 5 days</u>
Punitive Legal Measures: Using/Possession	Meloxicam isn't considered a controlled substance by the <u>Drug Enforcement Administration</u> , and it isn't listed on DEA Schedules I through V. The legal ramifications for possessing the drug without a prescription vary by state.
Punitive Legal Measures: Selling/Distributing	Varies by state. Although it doesn't get the user high, because it's listed as a prescription painkiller, there is a small <u>black market</u> for meloxicam, and it will be seized by drug enforcement agents.

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## II. Signs of Abuse

### Behavioral Symptoms of Meloxicam Usage and Abuse

**How Meloxicam affects the brain**

Meloxicam doesn't affect the brain's reward pathways the way narcotic pain relievers do, which is why it's considered a safer alternative for prescription pain management. Opioid-based pain relievers block pain signals sent from the brain to the body and release large amounts of dopamine, which makes a user feel good and crave a repeat of this feeling, which can lead to addiction. Because meloxicam doesn't cause changes in the brain or release feel-good hormones, it's not considered an addictive drug. However, it can cause psychological dependence in some people.

**Behavioral signs of Meloxicam usage and abuse**

Like any medication, meloxicam can still be abused. Taking more pills than directed, either by taking higher doses or more frequent doses, is considered abuse or misuse. It's possible to become dependent on meloxicam for pain relief and develop a psychological dependence. A person who has become convinced that they can't function without taking meloxicam may get anxious if they run out.

Behavioral signs of meloxicam abuse are similar to the signs associated with any other prescription drug abuse, such as running out of a prescription too soon from taking more than prescribed. Getting prescriptions from multiple doctors or pharmacies, trying to borrow pills or stealing pills from other people's prescriptions, and continuing to take it when there's no longer a therapeutic need for it are all behaviors that indicate meloxicam abuse.

A person who has become psychologically dependent on meloxicam might also become secretive about taking it, lie about how much they're taking, or spend an excessive amount of time thinking about how to get more. Abusing meloxicam may also be an indication that a person has a substance abuse disorder that needs to be addressed before they begin abusing more dangerous drugs or medications.

### Physical Symptoms of Meloxicam Abuse

**How Meloxicam affects the body**

When used correctly, meloxicam provides temporary relief from pain, inflammation, and swollen joints. Once the drug fully leaves the system, pain and inflammation will likely return, especially in those suffering from chronic pain or severe arthritis. Some common physical side effects of taking meloxicam include diarrhea, constipation, upset stomach, heartburn, gas, indigestion, nausea, dizziness, and stomach pain. Prolonged use can lead to stomach, liver, and kidney issues, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Constant fatigue, difficulty breathing, vomiting, swelling of the face, lips, or eyes, or blue-tinged skin, lips, or fingernails while taking meloxicam are signs of an overdose and the need for medical attention.

**Early physical effects of Meloxicam**

Meloxicam isn't a narcotic and doesn't cause euphoria. Physical effects should be relief from pain, inflammation, and swollen joints, but these may take a couple of hours or more while the drug reaches its peak concentration. Stomach upset can occur, but this may be countered by taking it with milk, food, or an antacid. It can take up to two weeks for meloxicam to fully take effect, and it should be taken at the same time each day.

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

Short-Term Physical Symptoms	
Initial (direct effects of drug, 30 – 60 min.)	Pain relief Inflammation relief Stomach upset Increased blood pressure (possible)
Lingering (within an hour of taking the drug)	Same as initial
Post-Use (several hours to days after use)	Returning pain and inflammation Psychological dependence possible

**Severe and long-term physical effects of Meloxicam**

Taking meloxicam, even as directed, can lead to common side effects. These may include gas, indigestion, heartburn, constipation, diarrhea, upset stomach, nausea, abdominal pain, and dizziness. Prolonged use can lead to more serious physical effects, such as stomach ulcers and bleeding in the stomach or digestive tract. The risk for stomach problems increases for those taking meloxicam daily, especially over long periods of time. People aged 65 and over and those with a history of stomach ulcers, taking blood thinners or corticosteroids, or abusing alcohol also have a greater risk of stomach problems.

All NSAIDs, including meloxicam, have the potential for adverse effects, primarily gastrointestinal and kidney issues. The FDA also warns that taking NSAIDs can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, and this risk may increase the longer they're taken and when taking them at higher doses. Meloxicam has also been linked to rare cases of acute liver injury of varying severity, from asymptomatic to symptomatic hepatitis with or without jaundice.

Unlike with opioids, stimulants, and alcohol, there are no withdrawal symptoms when stopping meloxicam, and tapering off isn't required. However, since it's used to treat pain and inflammation, suddenly stopping use will likely cause these symptoms to return. This is especially true for people with severe arthritis or chronic pain who've been abusing meloxicam to manage their pain. These individuals should talk with a doctor to learn how to lower consumption without leaving their pain unmanaged.

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

Long-term Physical Symptoms	
Casual	Diarrhea Constipation Upset stomach Heartburn Gas Indigestion Nausea Dizziness Stomach pain
Chronic (Including all of the above effects for casual use)	Stomach bleeding Stomach ulcers Liver injury Kidney issues Increased risk of heart attack and stroke
Withdrawal	No withdrawal symptoms, but quitting it will likely cause the pain, inflammation, swelling, and stiffness that it was treating to return.

**Further Resources**

Both the National Institute of Drug Abuse and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration offer in-depth information on the symptoms and treatment for prescription opioids, stimulants, and depressants.

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## III. Meloxicam Usage Demographics in the U.S.

**Prescription drug misuse is dropping in the U.S., but still a concern**

According to the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, the percentage of the population aged 12 or older who misused prescription pain relievers in the past year dropped from 4.7% in 2015 to 3.5% in 2019. This works out to a drop of nearly 3 million people, with 12.5 million misusers in 2015 compared to 9.7 million in 2019. This decline occurred in every age group, with misuse among adolescents aged 12 to 17 dropping from 3.9% to 2.3%, young adults aged 18 to 25 dropping from 8.5% to 5.2%, and adults aged 26 and older dropping from 4.1% to 3.4%. Despite these drops, misuse of prescription pain relievers remained second only to marijuana as the most common type of illicit drug use.

The NSDUH report assessed prescriptions containing oxycodone, hydrocodone, tramadol, morphine, oxycodone, hydromorphone, buprenorphine, codeine, fentanyl, methadone, and any other prescription pain reliever to compile its stats of prescription pain relievers. Although meloxicam wasn't expressly listed, it's possible it was in the mix of "any other prescription pain reliever." Meloxicam may still be abused recreationally due to some people's assumption that it produces the same high as other prescription pain medications. Unlike opioid and narcotic pain relievers, meloxicam won't give users a euphoric feeling, but that hasn't prevented a small black market for the drug from forming.

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## IV. How to Find Help

Although meloxicam isn't addictive, users can still develop a psychological dependence on the drug, especially those who are abusing it. Taking too much and/or for too long can lead to serious side effects, but many can be reversed with supportive care. Living with chronic pain can lead to anxiety, stress, and depression, so it's important to address pain management before stopping meloxicam usage.

Modifying behaviors may help with pain management and lower meloxicam usage without increasing anxiety, stress, and depression. Like other substance abuse treatments, behavioral therapies, talk therapies, and support groups may provide the treatment assistance needed for meloxicam dependence.

### 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

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

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