



**This letter has important information about your Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage. Please read it carefully.**

Need help or have questions? Call us at **800-633-1542 (TTY: 711)**. Our hours are Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (October 1 to March 31: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. 7 days a week.).

## VIVA MEDICARE

### **Opioid medicines: Risks and other treatment options**

Date: 03/07/2024

#### **Why we're writing**

We're writing to educate on the risk of using opioids for a long time. There is a lot of information here, but it is important for you to know.

#### **What are opioids?**

Prescription opioids are very strong drugs. They are used to treat pain — from mild aches to intense pain. They are usually prescribed after a surgery or an injury. Doctors also prescribe them for some long-term health problems. These drugs can be an important part of treatment.

**But, they also raise the chance of addiction, accidental overdose, and death.**

If you use an opioid for a long time, your body gets used to the drug. You will need more of it to feel better.

#### **Work with your doctor.**

Your doctor can tell you about ways to control your pain without prescription opioids. You might be able to take other drugs that are less risky. Or, you can do things to help lower your pain with less chance of causing harm.

Some of these options may even work better for you.

#### **Treating pain without opioids.**

Long-lasting pain can often be managed without opioids. A lot of options have been shown to work better and have fewer side effects:

- Over-the-counter medicines:
  - Oral pain relievers like acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), and naproxen (Aleve).
  - Topical pain relief creams and patches.
  - You can pay for most over-the-counter items using your plan's over-the-counter allowance. Go to [Viva.NationsBenefits.com](http://Viva.NationsBenefits.com) to learn more.



- Non-opioid prescriptions:
  - Lidocaine and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS).
  - Some medicines that are used for depression or seizures can treat pain, too.

**Other treatments are covered by your plan.**

In addition to non-opioid medicines, your plan covers a lot of ways to treat and manage pain. Review these options with your doctor.

- Chiropractic visits.
- Physical therapy.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy, part of your mental health benefits.
- Telehealth services for individual and group mental health and outpatient substance abuse.
- Exercise routine available through the Silver&Fit® Program. Your plan includes memberships at participating fitness centers, and an at-home digital option at no cost to you.

**If your doctor does prescribe an opioid.**

The biggest risk of using opioids to treat pain is **dependence**. Eventually your body is so used to having the opioid that you feel sick if you don't have it.

You can have symptoms of withdrawal when you stop taking it, especially if you stop taking it suddenly.

Common symptoms include:

- Anxiety.
- Body aches.
- Sweating.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Hallucinations.

Withdrawal symptoms can happen within 12 hours of stopping the drug. And, they can last a few days to a few weeks.

Your doctor will monitor you so when it is time to stop the drug, you'll be safe.

**Side effects to watch out for.**

Even when you follow your doctor's directions, you can still have side effects. Opioids cause constipation, nausea, vomiting, dry mouth, sleepiness, dizziness, confusion, depression, irritability, itching, and trouble breathing.

**Protecting yourself against an overdose.**

You and your doctor may decide that using an opioid is the best way to treat your pain.



- If so, be sure to talk to your doctor about **Naloxone**. Naloxone is a drug that can be given during an opioid overdose. This medicine could save your life. Keeping it with you can give you and your family members some peace of mind. Your doctor can give you a prescription for Naloxone. Naloxone is also now available over-the-counter. Because it is now available over-the-counter, you can pay for it just like other over-the-counter items using your plan's over-the-counter allowance. You can go to [Viva.NationsBenefits.com](http://Viva.NationsBenefits.com) to purchase Naloxone.

### **Medication-assisted treatment.**

Medication-assisted treatment treats opioid dependence. It uses medicines along with counseling and behavioral therapy. It can also help some people stay in recovery.

The FDA has approved three drugs for this treatment:

- Buprenorphine.
- Methadone.
- Naltrexone.

### **Talk to your doctor**

Always talk to your doctor about the medicines you take.

Learn as much as you can about your treatment choices and any issues with those treatments. This way, you and your doctor can choose the safest care that helps you feel better and meets your treatment goals.

### **Resources for more information about pain management and opioids.**

#### **[hhs.gov/opioids](http://hhs.gov/opioids)**

Find out about State and Federal public health resources that can help you learn more about opioid medications and how to use them safely.

#### **[medicare.gov/coverage/pain-management](http://medicare.gov/coverage/pain-management)**

Information on Medicare coverage for pain management.

We know this is a lot of information.

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