How to Safely Take Prescription Opioid Pills for Acute Pain

Governor’s Cabinet Opiate Action Team

Step 1: Manage pain and expectations
Acute pain can result from a procedure, an injury or sudden condition. This pain, left untreated, can interfere with your work, sleep and daily life. It is important to know what to expect in your healthcare so you can take care of your pain with the help of your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Ice or heat can be helpful, in addition to special stretches or exercises.

Step 2: Take pain medicine safely and effectively
Clinicians often recommend taking safer, non-prescription pain medicine such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen alone or with prescription pain pills. Prescription pain pills, particularly opioids, have risks including addiction or getting hooked on them. So, it is important to stop taking opioids as soon as your function improves.

Step 3: Transition off opioid pills used for acute pain
A schedule, such as the example below, may help track medication use to reduce the side effects as well as the number of pills needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY 1</th>
<th>DAY 2</th>
<th>DAY 3-4</th>
<th>DAY 5</th>
<th>DAY 6</th>
<th>DAY 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NON-OPIOID MEDICINE</strong></td>
<td><strong>OPIOID MEDICINE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Initial dose required to manage pain (e.g. 2 tablets every 4 hours while awake)</td>
<td>Increase the time in-between doses by 2 hours (e.g. 2 tablets every 6 hours or 6 per day.)</td>
<td>Reduce the dose to half of initial dose (e.g. 1 tablet every 6 hours.)</td>
<td>Decrease dose frequency of opioid medicine.</td>
<td>Stop taking opioid pain medicine. Return to normal function.</td>
<td>Continue taking non-opioid medicine as directed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 tablets/day</td>
<td>8 tablets/day</td>
<td>4 tablets/day</td>
<td>2 tablets/day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Take fewer opioids over time**

Remember to safely dispose unused pills.

Clinicians may use the blank spaces on the pill bottles above to write in recommended doses for patients.

Step 4: At your follow-up clinician visit, discuss safe disposal of any unused medicine.