

# Safe and Effective Pain Control After Surgery

## *A Guide for Children, Teens, and Families*

### What Is Safe and Effective Pain Control?

Safe pain control means using medication and non-medication therapies that relieve pain while causing the fewest possible side effects.

### What Are the Goals of Pain Control?

- Minimize pain
- Keep your child moving
- Speed healing
- Help resume normal activities

**Your surgical team will work with you and your child to:**

- **Check** for current opioid use and risk for overuse
- **Use alternatives** to opioids whenever possible
- **Educate you** about:
  - Different types of therapies and medications to treat pain
  - Using non-opioids or the lowest dose of opioids for the shortest amount of time
  - How to tell if your child is in mild, moderate, or severe pain
  - Safe temporary storage
  - How to get rid of any unused opioids when you are done with them
  - Knowing and recognizing the signs of opioid overdose and what to do

### How to Safely Use Opioids

- ✓ Only use opioids for severe pain.
- ✓ Safely get rid of any unused medication as soon as it is no longer needed.



Image Credit: kupicoo/E+ via Getty Images

***From the operating room to home—your surgical team cares about your best recovery.***

*Your surgical care team may include many providers, such as your surgeon, anesthesia provider, pharmacist, nurses, and therapists.*

# How Can Opioids Be Used to Safely Manage my Child's Severe Pain?

## Parents:

- ✓ **Communicate** often with your child about his or her pain.
- ✓ **Watch** your child take their prescribed medication.
- ✓ **Watch** for adverse events or signs of non-medical prescription opioid use.

### Be prepared.

Naloxone is an opioid overdose reversal medicine. It is also called NARCAN® Nasal Spray. It should be prescribed anytime opioids are prescribed. If you don't get this, ask your pharmacist. You can also get it without a prescription (over the counter).

Keep naloxone nasal spray on hand. Know when to use it. Ask your pharmacist to show you how to use it. Steps for use may also be on the package.

### Giving Naloxone Nasal Spray

1. Place tip of the nasal spray into one nostril of the person who overdosed.
2. Push up on the plunger to spray the medicine.



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## Your Child Should:

- ✓ **Take the lowest dose possible.**
- ✓ **Tell your provider** about any other medicines. Include ones you take without a prescription.
- ✓ **Exercise extreme caution** if your child is taking certain medicines (see examples below). **Check** with the provider. Combining these with opioids can increase your child's risks of side effects, including overdose.
  - antihistamines or sleep aids
  - sedatives or tranquilizers
  - anti-anxiety medication
  - muscle relaxers
  - cough medicines containing codeine
  - another opioid
- ✓ **Never take more medication than prescribed.**
- ✓ **Never take medication prescribed for someone else.**
- ✓ **Never crush pills.** This can speed the rate your child's body absorbs the opioid and cause an overdose.
- ✓ **Ask your surgical team** for a liquid option if your child can't take pills.

## Recognizing and Responding to an Opioid Overdose

*A child can die from an opioid overdose.*

### Signs of an Opioid Overdose

- Lips or fingernails turn purple or blue
- Vomiting
- Pale or clammy face
- Limp body
- Small pupils
- Slow or stopped breathing or heartbeat
- Unconsciousness—can't wake up or speak

### What to Do

- Give naloxone.
- Call 911.
- Try to keep them awake and breathing.
- Lay the person on their side.
- Stay until help is there.



See the CDC website for more information, including how to give the nasal spray: *What to Do if You Think Someone is Overdosing* | Stop Overdose, CDC

# How Can I Help My Child Feel Better?

Your child's pain may be controlled with a combination of non-medication therapies and non-opioid medications. For complex procedures, your child's pain plan may also include opioids. After one to several days, the need for opioids will decrease. Use the guide below to help manage your child's pain.

**Children with chronic pain or a history of prolonged opioid use will have an individualized plan for postoperative pain control.**

| How Intense Is My Child's Pain? |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | How to Help                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>MILD PAIN</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>My child hardly notices the pain, and it does not interfere with his or her activities.</li><li>My child notices the pain and it is distracting.</li><li>He or she can still do their normal activities (sitting up, walking, standing, playing). They may occasionally grimace.</li></ul> | <b>Non-medication therapies</b><br>+<br><b>Non-opioid, oral medications</b><br>You may give these to your child to control mild pain when needed.                                 |
| <b>MODERATE PAIN</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>My child's pain is hard to ignore.</li><li>Pain is interfering with my child's usual activities.</li><li>They may be crying but can be distracted.</li></ul>                                                                                                                               | <b>Non-medication therapies</b><br>+<br><b>Non-opioid, oral medications</b><br>You may give these to your child on a schedule rather than as needed.                              |
| <b>SEVERE PAIN</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>My child is focused on the pain and is not doing activities.</li><li>They are groaning in pain, unable to do anything, crying, difficult to comfort, or cannot sleep.</li></ul>                                                                                                            | <b>Non-medication therapies</b><br>+<br><b>Around-the-clock non-opioid medications</b><br>+<br><b>Short-acting opioids</b><br>Call your child's surgeon if severe pain continues. |

*Adapted from the FLACC scale*



It is easier to manage pain when it is lower. Check in with your child often to assess and help control their pain before it grows.

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via Getty Images

# What Are Common Pain Control Therapies and Medications?

Some medications used during surgery may decrease your child's need for opioids.

## Non-Medication Therapies

| MILD PAIN | Therapy          | Description                                                     |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
|           | Self-care        | Ice packs, raising the body part, and resting the surgical site |
|           | Distraction      | Reading, games, music, videos, relaxation breathing             |
|           | Physical therapy | Guided exercises from a therapist                               |
|           | Light activity   | Walking and normal play if surgeon allows it                    |

## Non-Opioid, Oral Medications

| MODERATE PAIN | Medication                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Considerations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Dosing                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|               | <b>Acetaminophen</b><br>Decreases pain and fever<br><br>Examples:      Available as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Children's Tylenol®</li><li>Panadol®</li><li>FeverAll® (suppository)</li><li>Generic brands available</li></ul>   | Some over the counter cough cold medicine and prescription pain medicine also has acetaminophen in it.<br><br>Ask your doctor or pharmacist about using other medicine when taking acetaminophen.<br><br>Talk with your doctor if these are used together. | Medication doses are based on your child's weight. Follow package directions for dosing. Your surgical team and pharmacist will also explain the correct dosage and timing for your child.<br><br>Use a tool meant for medications to measure a dose. Examples are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>dosing spoon or cup</li><li>oral syringe or dropper</li></ul> |
|               | <b>Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)</b><br>Decrease pain, swelling, and fever<br><br>Examples:      Available as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®)</li><li>Generic brands available</li></ul> | Take this medicine with food. It may upset your child's stomach.                                                                                                                                                                                           | If you did not get one, or need help using it, ask your pharmacist.<br><br>Ask your doctor if they will want you to alternate acetaminophen with an NSAID given at different times.                                                                                                                                                                                     |

## Opioids\*

| SEVERE PAIN | Medication                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Considerations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Dosing                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|             | <b>Opioids</b><br>Decreases severe pain—blocks pain signals in your brain and spinal cord<br><br>Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Hydromorphone (Dilaudid®)</li><li>Oxycodone (OxyContin®)</li><li>Oxycodone with acetaminophen (Percocet®, Oxyket®)</li><li>Morphine</li><li>Generic brands available</li></ul> | For opioid-related constipation, you may give your child plenty of water. Fiber-rich foods may also help. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Fruits (like raspberries, apples, prunes, and pears)</li><li>Vegetables (like broccoli, spinach, peas, beans)</li><li>Nuts</li></ul><br>If these methods aren't effective, ask your surgical team about a stool softener or laxative. | Dosing is based on the child's weight. Your doctor and pharmacist will determine the appropriate dose.<br><br>When you take an opioid, pain control may start within 15–60 minutes. This depends on the medication.<br><br>New opioid prescriptions for children and teens are usually limited. If your child's severe pain lasts longer, call your doctor to be seen. |

**\*Opioid side effects may occur.** Check the medication label/package insert for possible side effects.

See <https://medlineplus.gov> for more information. **Serious risks:** Prescription opioid risks include non-medical prescription opioid use, abuse, addiction, overdose (taking too much of the medication), and very slow breathing (which can lead to death).

**If any of these serious risks occur, stop taking the medication. Call your provider or go to the emergency room.**

See: Recognizing and Responding to an Opioid Overdose.

# How Do I Store and Safely Dispose of My Leftover Opioids?



Image Credit: YT/E+ via Getty Images

## Do not share opioids.

More than 40% of people who misuse opioids, including high school students, get them from a friend or relative.

### Where Should I Keep Medication During Use?

- In a secure location, preferably a locked cabinet or container
- Keep medication out of reach of children and pets
- Keep medication in its original container to avoid taking it by mistake
- Keep track of the location and number of pills or liquid in the bottle

Most opioids prescribed are not used.  
Get rid of any unused medication when you are done.

### How Do I Get Rid of Leftover Opioids?:

- Check the medication label. It may include how to dispose of the unused medication.
- Ask your pharmacy for an FDA-approved mail-back bag or if they have a safe drop site.
- Check to see if your medication can be safely flushed down the drain.
- Mix unused pills with coffee grounds, dirt, or kitty litter in a plastic bag, and then throw it in the trash.

### What Are the Risks of My Child Becoming Addicted to Opioids?

Anyone who takes prescription opioids can become addicted. There are multiple factors for why people may become addicted.

Check to see that your child's pain is decreasing over the days following surgery. Call your doctor if you think your child is misusing their pain medication, experiencing tolerance, or experiencing physical dependence.

For questions and resources to help you or a loved one cope with a substance use disorder, visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website at [samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov) or call the 24-hour helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357).



View your options at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration: *Disposal of Unused Medicines: What You Should Know* | FDA



## Workgroup, Contributors, and Additional Resources



To find more information about opioids, pain control,  
and the references listed in the brochure, please visit:  
*[facs.org/safepaincontrol](https://facs.org/safepaincontrol)*

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