

The Drug Files

Prescription Drugs – Opioid Analgesics (Painkillers)

Street names

- codeine (Atasol, Tylenol 2, 3 or 4)
- morphine
- methadone
- meperidine (Demerol)
- hydromorphone (Dilaudid)
- oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet)

Description

Opioid analgesics are a type of prescription drugs that are used for the medical purpose of relieving pain. When a person takes opioid analgesics outside of their medical use, or in increasing dosage and frequency without talking to a doctor first, it becomes prescription drug abuse. Opioid analgesics act on the brain by activating opioid receptors. By activating these receptors, opioid analgesics increase the release of the neurotransmitter dopamine. This increase in dopamine causes the intense feeling of happiness and pleasure that people feel when they use these drugs. As well, opioid analgesics also act on the brain by interfering with the transmission of pain messages to the brain.

Origin and medical usage

These drugs are made in the labs of pharmaceutical companies for a medical purpose. Opioid analgesics are used for people with chronic pain or pain after undergoing surgery.

Short-term effects

The short-term effects of opioid painkiller use may include relaxation, drowsiness, itching, sweating, dilated pupils, vision problems, nausea, vomiting, lack of concentration, constipation, anxiety, slowed breathing, fatigue and decreased appetite.

Long term effects

The long-term effects of opioid painkiller use may include depression, insomnia, tolerance, death from respiratory depression, HIV/AIDS and hepatitis from injection usage, decreased concentration and decreased pain threshold.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal is what happens when people stop taking opioid analgesics. Withdrawal from opioid use may include symptoms such as insomnia, vomiting, restlessness,

diarrhea, cold flashes, muscle spasms, tremors, anxiety, sweating and muscle and bone pain.

Legal status

Unlawful possession and obtaining multiple prescriptions are criminal offences. Possessions for the purpose of trafficking, import, export or production are all criminal offences.

Signs that a person may be using

Signs that a person may be abusing prescription painkillers may include, but are not limited to, constricted pupils, decreased appetite, wearing long sleeves to cover up rashes or track marks from injection use, a change in appearance or decrease in personal hygiene, prescriptions in the home go missing or come up short, frequent requests for new prescriptions, secretiveness, failing to fulfil duties at school, work and the home, and loss of interest in hobbies.