

# MEDICAL RISKS OF LONG-TERM OPIOID USE

Medical risk	How common?	Description and information
<b>Respiratory depression</b>		
Opioid overdose	< 1% per year but increases with dose	Caused by severely slowed breathing, which you may not notice Severe cases are treated in the hospital Can cause death
Breathing problems during sleep	Not known	Opioids may cause or worsen sleep apnea You may not notice breathing problems
<b>Injuries</b>		
Falls and fractures	Not known	
Motor vehicle crashes	Not known	
<b>Gastrointestinal problems</b>		
Constipation	30 - 40%	It helps to use stool-softeners or drugs that stimulate bowel movements
Serious intestinal blockage	<1% per year	Caused by severe constipation Severe cases are treated in the hospital
<b>Hormonal effects</b>		
Hypogonadism, impotence, infertility, osteoporosis	25% - 75%	Hypogonadism = lowered sex hormones, which can worsen sexual function Osteoporosis can make you more likely to fracture or break a bone
<b>Cognitive and neurophysiologic effects</b>		
Sedation	15%	Can cause difficulty driving or thinking clearly
Disruption of sleep	Not known	
Hyperalgesia	Not known	Hyperalgesia = being more sensitive to pain
<b>Psychosocial</b>		
Depression, anxiety, de-activation, apathy	Not known	Depression can worsen pain, while pain can worsen depression. Opioids can cause loss of interest in usual activities, which can increase depression.
Addiction, misuse, and diversion	5 - 30%	Common signs of prescription opioid addiction are preoccupation with opioid use or craving, unsuccessful attempts to discontinue use or cut down, cutting down or giving up activities due to opioid use, and using more medication than prescribed.
<b>Oral Health</b>		
Dry mouth that may sometimes cause tooth decay	Dry mouth is common	Brush your teeth and rinse your mouth often Chew sugarless gum and drink water or sugar-free, non-carbonated fluids
Myoclonus	Not Known	Myoclonus = muscle twitching

Reference: Group Health, Chronic Opioid Therapy for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain Guideline, 2010.