

TIPS FOR DECREASING YOUR MEDICATION

A decrease in the amount of medication is sometimes called a taper. People often worry that they will not be able to manage their pain if their medicine is changed. The good news is that most people actually feel better after they taper medication because their doctor works with them to find new and better ways to treat their pain.



GETTING READY TO DECREASE YOUR MEDICATION

- Communicate with healthcare staff** about your goals for reducing your medication and ask them what other resources are available to help manage your persistent pain.
- Slow tapers** produce the fewest symptoms. Many people find this the easiest method.

GETTING SUPPORT

- Make social plans** during your medication reduction. The extra social support will help boost your mood and keep you motivated.
- Learn about therapies** like cognitive behavioral therapy and mindfulness therapy that can help stop negative thoughts and reduce stress or pain. Ask your healthcare team about getting a referral to specialists in these therapies.



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

- Improve your sleep quality** by learning more about “sleep hygiene” or behaviors to help you sleep better.
- Staying active** is very important for managing your persistent pain. It helps your body deal with the stress that may occur during your medication reduction process.
- Maintain good nutrition and drink lots of water**, so that you can maintain high levels of energy by avoiding dehydration during the medication reduction.

IS IT A GOOD IDEA TO DECREASE YOUR MEDICATION?

Just like how medical science discovers new things about diseases, it also makes new discoveries about opioids and pain. We now know that for persistent/chronic pain, opioids don't work as well as other treatments and opioids have a lot of risks for your health.

Healthy habits and strong support from healthcare staff, family, and friends are key to managing pain. You and your healthcare team may feel that decreasing your opioid medication is the safest option for your pain management if any of these are true:

- The medication dose keeps going up, but your pain isn't getting much better.
- The medication's side effects make it too difficult to function normally in your day-to-day life.
- You are prescribed both opioids and other high-risk medications like benzodiazepines at the same time.
- Other health risks are present like sleep apnea, pulmonary or lung disease, liver disease, renal disease, susceptibility to falling, or being 65 or older.
- There is evidence of or concern for misuse of medication.
- You as a patient want to get off pain medication.

Speak with your healthcare team in more detail about whether reducing your medication is the best and safest course of action for you. Once you and your healthcare team have decided that you should have your medication reduced, you need to decide on a schedule with your prescriber.

Below are a few reassuring facts about tapering that might ease your mind about the process:

- The easiest and safest way to reduce your medication dose is to do it slowly and consistently.
- People that reduce their medication slowly find that the symptoms are mild and manageable.
- Many people are surprised to find that once they have completed a taper, they have less pain than they did before.

This process is safe and if done slowly and consistently, not too difficult. People who have their opioid medications reduced slowly may find any symptoms they have are manageable, or find that there are hardly any symptoms.

There are things that you can do to help your medication reduction go smoothly, like talking with your healthcare team about the process, getting support outside of your healthcare team, and taking care of yourself.