

Could This Mean You?

Alcohol Use and Pain Medications May Be Harmful to Your Health

Pain Medications



Doctors prescribe opiates to help patients manage acute and chronic pain. These medications modify a person's sensation of pain. Opiates also affect the pleasure centers of the brain causing a sense of joy and euphoria. Your doctor may need to adjust medication levels several times, or when your condition changes. Taken as directed by a doctor, these medications are safe and rarely lead to dependency.

Physical dependence is far more likely with misuse of opiate medications. When this happens, a person may start going to more than one doctor, or may buy these medications from others or the Internet. Attempts to reduce the amount taken or stop the drug suddenly may cause increased craving for the drug and withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, muscle and joint pains, and diarrhea. Contact your doctor immediately if these events occur.

Can your use of opiate pain medications cause problems or dependency? Answer the following question:

In the past 12 months, have you used your pain medication in ways or amounts other than those required for medical reasons?

If you answered **yes**, talk to your doctor about your potential health risk.

Alcohol

For most adults, drinking small amounts of alcohol is safe. In fact, certain evidence suggests that drinking a glass of red wine daily may provide health benefits. However, moderate to heavy drinking can increase your risk for a range of physical, mental health, and social problems.

To determine if you are at risk for increased mental, medical, or social problems answer the questions below. Circle the number that matches your answer. When you've answered all of the questions, add up the circled numbers to get your score.

How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?

- (0) Never
- (1) Monthly or Less
- (2) 2 to 4 Times a Month
- (3) 2 to 3 Times a Week
- (4) 4 or More Times a Week

How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?

- (0) 1 or 2
- (1) 3 or 4
- (2) 5 or 6
- (3) 7, 8, or 9
- (4) 10 or More

How often do you have six or more drinks on one occasion?

- (0) Never
- (1) Less Than Monthly
- (2) Monthly
- (3) Weekly
- (4) Daily or Almost Daily

Men: If your score is less than 4 you are at low risk. **Talk to your doctor about potential health risks if your score is 4 or more.**

Women: If your score is less than 3 you are at low risk. **Talk to your doctor about potential health risks if your score is 3 or more.**

