TURN THE TIDE

PRESCRIBING OPIOIDS FOR CHRONIC PAIN

ADAPTED FROM CDC GUIDELINE

Opioids can provide short-term benefits for moderate to severe pain. Scientific evidence is lacking for the benefits to treat chronic pain.

IN GENERAL, DO NOT PRESCRIBE OPIOIDS AS THE FIRST-LINE TREATMENT FOR CHRONIC PAIN (for adults 18+ with chronic pain > 3 months excluding active cancer, palliative, or end-of-life care).

BEFORE PRESCRIBING

1 ASSESS PAIN & FUNCTION

Use a validated pain scale. Example: PEG scale where the score = average 3 individual question scores (30% improvement from baseline is clinically meaningful).

Q1: What number from 0 – 10 best describes your PAIN in the past week? (0 = "no pain", 10 = "worst you can imagine")

Q2: What number from 0 – 10 describes how, during the past week, pain has interfered with your ENJOYMENT OF LIFE? (0 = "not at all", 10 = "complete interference")

Q3: What number from 0 – 10 describes how, during the past week, pain has interfered with your GENERAL ACTIVITY? (0 = "not at all", 10 = "complete interference")

2 CONSIDER IF NON-OPIOID THERAPIES ARE APPROPRIATE**

Such as: NSAIDs, TCAs, SNRIs, anti-convulsants, exercise or physical therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy.

3 TALK TO PATIENTS ABOUT TREATMENT PLAN

- Set realistic goals for pain and function based on diagnosis.
- Discuss benefits, side effects, and risks (e.g., addiction, overdose).
- Set criteria for stopping or continuing opioid. Set criteria for regular progress assessment.
- Check patient understanding about treatment plan.

4 EVALUATE RISK OF HARM OR MISUSE. CHECK:

- Known risk factors: illegal drug use; prescription drug use for nonmedical reasons; history of substance use disorder or overdose; mental health conditions; sleep-disordered breathing.
- Prescription drug monitoring program data (if available) for opioids or benzodiazepines from other sources.
- Urine drug screen to confirm presence of prescribed substances and for undisclosed prescription drug or illicit substance use.
- Medication interactions. AVOID CONCURRENT OPIOID AND BENZODIAZEPINE USE WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

WHEN YOU PRESCRIBE

START LOW AND GO SLOW. IN GENERAL:

- Start with immediate-release (IR) opioids at the lowest dose for the shortest therapeutic duration. IR opioids are recommended over ER/LA products when starting opioids.
- Avoid ≥ 90 MME/day; consider specialist to support management of higher doses.
- If prescribing ≥ 50 MME/day, increase follow-up frequency; consider offering naloxone for overdose risk.
- For acute pain: prescribe < 3 day supply; more than 7 days will rarely be required.
- Counsel patients about safe storage and disposal of unused opioids.

See below for MME comparisons. For MME conversion factors and calulator, go to TurnTheTideRx.org/treatment.

50 MORPHINE MILLLIGRAM EQUIVALENTS (MME)/DAY:

- 50 mg of hydrocodone (10 tablets of hydrocodone/acetaminophen 5/300)
- 33 mg of oxycodone (~2 tablets of oxycodone sustained-release 15mg)

90 MORPHINE MILLLIGRAM EQUIVALENTS (MME)/DAY:

- 90 mg of hydrocodone (18 tablets of hydrocodone/acetaminophen 5/300)
- 60 mg of oxycodone (4 tablets of oxycodone sustained-release 15mg)

AFTER INITIATION OF OPIOID THERAPY

ASSESS, TAILOR & TAPER

- Reassess benefits/risks within 1-4 weeks after initial assessment.
- Assess pain and function and compare results to baseline. Schedule reassessment at regular intervals (≤ 3 months).
- Continue opioids only after confirming clinically meaningful improvements in pain and function without significant risks or harm.
- If over-sedation or overdose risk, then taper. Example taper plan: 10% decrease in original dose per week or month. Consider psychosocial support.
- Tailor taper rates individually to patients and monitor for withdrawal symptoms.

TREATING OVERDOSE & ADDICTION

- Screen for opioid use disorder (e.g., difficulty controlling use; see DSM-5 criteria). If yes, treat with medication-assisted treatment (MAT). MAT combines behavioral therapy with medications like methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone. Refer to findtreatment.samhsa.gov. Additional resources at TurnTheTideRx.org/treatment and www.hhs.gov/opioids.
- Learn about medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and apply to be a MAT provider at www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment.
- Consider offering naloxone if high risk for overdose: history of overdose or substance use disorder, higher opioid dosage (≥ 50 MME/day), concurrent benzodiazepine use.

✶✶NON-OPIOID MEDICATION ALTERNATIVES:

Drug Name	Typical Dose	Side Effects[6]
Acetaminophen	500-650mg QID	Caution with alcohol use, Liver
Ibuprofen	600-800mg 3-4x/d.	Stomach, bleeding, Renal
Naproxen	250-500 BID	Stomach, bleeding, Renal
Meloxicam	7.5-15mg QD	Stomach, bleeding, Renal
Celecoxib	100-200mg QD-BID	Stomach, bleeding, Renal
Indomethacin	25-50mg BID	Headache, vomiting, Bleeding, Renal
Diclofenac 1% gel	2-4g QID	Systemic absorption possible
Voltaren 1% gel	4g of 1% gel QID	Systemic absorption possible
Lidocaine 5% Patch	1-3 patches at a time	Apply 12 hours/day maximum
Tizanadine	2-8mg TID	Hypotension, somnolence
Cyclobenzarprine	5-10mg TID	Somnolence, dizziness
Methocarbamol	750mg-1.5 QID	Somnolence, dizziness
Amitriptyline	25→50-100mg QHS	Somnolence, dry mouth
Duloxetine	30→60mg QD	Somnolence, nausea
Fluoxetine	10-80mg QD	Taper when discontinue
Gabapentin	100→300→1200 TID	Somnolence, dizziness
Pregabalin	75-150 BID	Taper when discontinue; dizziness
Tramadol	50mg 3-6x/day	Taper when discontinue; opioid
Hydrocodone/Acetaminophen	5/500 BID #9-15	Short course appropriate; opioid

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of health care practitioners committed to ending the opioid crisis at TurnTheTideRx.org.

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