



PAIGE'S STORY

"Yep, they definitely have to come out." Paige had been dreading getting her wisdom teeth removed, and her dentist just confirmed her worst fear. Though all her friends had already gone through it, Paige was terrified of the recovery—especially since she'd never had surgery before. "The good news is, you can do it over winter break so you won't miss school," her dentist assured her. "They'll probably prescribe Vicodin or OxyContin, so you won't be in much pain."

A few days later, as Paige lay in bed with a heating pad against her jaw, the Vicodin left her drowsy and disoriented. Through half-closed eyes, she saw her brother quietly open her pill bottle, take a few pills, and slip out. "He must think I'm asleep," she thought. "I need to tell Mom to hide them." Before she could, she drifted back to sleep.

When her mom came in later with water, Paige remembered. "Mom, I don't want to get Peter in trouble, but I saw him take some of my painkillers." Her mother's face went pale. She opened the bottle and counted. "You're right—some are missing. I'll handle it."

Fortunately, Peter hadn't used or sold any of the pills yet. Their mom locked them away and sat both siblings down once Paige felt better. "Do you realize how dangerous this could've been?" she said. "It's easy to get addicted to these, and even easier to overdose."

IF YOU SUSPECT MISUSE

Talk without judgment. Offer support and encourage medical help. Treatment works and recovery is possible.

Naloxone (Narcan) can reverse an opioid overdose and is available without a prescription in most states. If someone is unresponsive or not breathing, call 9-1-1 and administer naloxone if available.

TEST YOURSELF

- Opioids are depressants.
a. True b. False
- "Percs" is a slang term for Percocet.
a. True b. False
- Most people who use heroin first misused prescription opioids.
a. True b. False
- Opioids and opiates both refer to drugs that relieve pain and slow the central nervous system.
a. True b. False
- Which of the following is not a symptom of withdrawal?
a. Anxiety b. Nausea
c. Feeling euphoric d. Headaches

Answers: 1. A 2. B 3. A 4. A 5. C



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STAY SAFE SERIES

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OPIOIDS



PROBLEM WITH PAINKILLERS

WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

The term "opioids" includes a wide range of drugs, from prescription pain relievers like oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, and morphine to drugs such as heroin or fentanyl. These drugs act on the central nervous system to relieve pain and can cause relaxation or euphoria.

When taken as prescribed for a short time, they can be safe. When misused, taken in higher doses, more often, or without a prescription, they can cause addiction, overdose, or death.

Common prescription opioids include: OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, Demerol, and Morphine.

OPIOIDS VS. OPIATES?

What's the difference?

Both terms describe drugs that act on the body's opioid receptors to relieve pain.

Opiates come directly from the opium poppy plant (for example, morphine and codeine).

Opioids include both natural opiates and man-made or semi-synthetic versions such as oxycodone or fentanyl.

Regardless of type, all can be addictive and lead to overdose if misused.

WHAT'S THE LINGO?

Street Names

Because there are so many different opioids, slang terms vary widely. Common examples include:

- "Perks/Percs" = Percocet
- "Oxy" = Oxycodone or OxyContin
- "Vikes" = Vicodin
- "H" or "Smack" = Heroin
- "China White" = Fentanyl



SIGNS OF MISUSE OR ADDICTION

Know the Dangers

Physical signs:

- Pinpoint pupils
- Extreme drowsiness
- Slowed breathing
- Constipation
- Confusion
- Euphoria followed by fatigue



BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

- "Doctor shopping" or frequent lost prescriptions
- Social withdrawal
- Hidden pills or extra bottles in trash
- Dramatically changing moods

LONG TERM SIGNS OF MISUSE

Prolonged misuse can lead to:

- Weakened immune system
- Digestive issues and constipation
- Infections from injection use (abscesses, HIV, Hepatitis C)
- Heart, lung, liver, and kidney damage

WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

Stopping opioids suddenly after dependence can cause uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous withdrawal symptoms:

- Headaches
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Sweating
- Anxiety
- Insomnia or restlessness

FACTS AND STATS (UNITED STATES)

- Over 80 million opioid prescriptions were filled in 2023.
- Nearly 3 million Americans live with opioid use disorder.
- Synthetic opioids (like fentanyl) are the leading cause of overdose deaths.
- Most current heroin users first misused prescription opioids.

PROBLEM WITH PAINKILLERS

Prescription opioids can be very effective for short-term pain, but dependence can develop quickly, even after just a few days. Misusing opioids by taking more than prescribed or using someone else's prescription can lead to addiction and overdose.

In 2023, more than 75% of all U.S. drug-overdose deaths involved an opioid, often fentanyl.

