

# OPIOID AWARENESS

## WHAT IS AN OPIOID

I'm sure we all have seen at least one if not a handful of news stories in the last year about opioid abuse and overdoses. Some of us may have been directly affected by this issue, knowing someone who has struggled with misuse or addiction. So what exactly is an opioid? An opioid is a drug that works by binding to opioid receptors in the brain, spinal cord, and other areas of the body. It reduces the sending of pain messages to the brain which reduces feelings of pain. Opioids are used to treat moderate to severe pain for individuals that may not respond well to other pain medications. They can cause an intense "high" that can lead to dependence and addiction as individuals continue to chase this "high." Common opioids include oxycodone (Oxycontin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), codeine, morphine, fentanyl, and methadone.

## OPIOID MISUSE

Regular opioid use can lead to dependence and when misused, can lead to overdose incidents and deaths. More than 90 Americans die after overdosing on opioids every day according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They estimate that the total "economic burden" of prescription opioid misuse alone in the United States is \$78.5 billion a year, including costs of health care, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement.



## WHAT CAN BE DONE

So what can be done to shift these trends and address this issue? The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is focusing its efforts on these major categories: improving access to treatment and recovery services, promoting use of overdose-reversing drugs, strengthening our understanding of the epidemic through better public health surveillance, providing support for

cutting-edge research on pain and addiction, and advancing better practices for pain management.

Many actions are being taken to help spearhead this movement toward reversing the opioid crisis. Medication-assisted opioid treatment programs that are part of a new, hub-and-spoke model of care aimed at reaching more patients with opioid use disorder are opening across the country. These programs are geared toward reaching patients in their communities with a range of evidence-based therapies and services led by experts in addiction medicine.

## OPIOID HELP LINE

There are resources you can utilize to help either yourself or a loved one who may be suffering from this problem. The National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Hotline was established to help find resources for individuals suffering from a prescription drug or heroin problem. You can contact them by calling **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** for information about treatment resources. The call is completely confidential. This hotline, staffed by trained professionals, is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is available in both English and Spanish.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For support from a registered nurse or registered dietitian or to ask questions, please call a Blues On Call<sup>SM</sup> health coach at **1-888-BLUE-428**.

Log in to the member website listed on the back of your member ID card.

- Click on the **Wellness** tab.
- Click on **Additional Resources** on the left.
- Click on **Health Topics** under **WebMD health information** to search health topics or use the medical encyclopedia to review health issues you want to know more about.

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