

Understanding the use of opioids and other medications in later life



What are opioids and benzodiazepines?

- Opioids are a type of drug that is used to treat pain.
- Prescription opioids are prescribed by doctors, but opioids can also include drugs such as heroin and car-fentanyl.¹
- When taken properly, they can reduce pain in older adults and help improve their day-to-day functioning.²
- Benzodiazepines are a type of drug that helps slow down the brain and feel calm.³
- Benzodiazepines can be prescribed by doctors to treat anxiety disorders, sleep disorders and seizure disorders.^{3,4}

What is problematic use?

When you use a drug differently than what your doctor has prescribed, such as taking more pills, more frequently or longer than prescribed.⁵

How can I use medication safely?^{1,3}

- Only take medications your doctor prescribes to you
- Don't drink alcohol or use with other depressant drugs
- Never use another person's medication
- Return any unused medication to the pharmacy

Where can I get help?



Resources and support for mental health and addictions are available in your community.

For more information, connect with any of the following organizations:

Ontario Addiction Treatment Centres

<https://www.oatc.ca/> 1-877-937-2282

Community Information Centres

www.211Ontario.ca Dial 211

ConnexOntario

Contact for 24/7, confidential and free information about mental health, addiction and problem gambling services throughout Ontario.

www.connexontario.ca

1-866-531-2600

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

www.camh.ca 1-800-463-2338

Resources

Opioids info sheet, Choosing Wisely Canada <https://choosingwiselycanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Opioids-When-you-need-them-and-when-you-dont.pdf>

Insomnia and anxiety in older people: Sleeping pills are usually not the best solution, Choosing Wisely Canada <https://choosingwiselycanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Sleeping-pills-EN.pdf>

References

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2. Malec, M. & Shega, J. (2015). Pain management in the elderly. *Medical Clinics of North America*, 99, 337–350.
3. Choosing Wisely Canada. (2017). *Opioids: When you need them - and when you don't*. Available: <https://choosingwiselycanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Opioids-When-you-need-them-and-when-you-dont.pdf>. Accessed February 6, 2020.
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5. Markota, M., Rummans, T., Bostwick, J.M. & Lapid, M. (2016). *Benzodiazepine use in older adults: Dangers, management, and alternative therapies*. *Mayo Clinical Process*, 91 (11), 1632–1639.