

# OPIOIDS

Opioids (also called analgesics) are a group of drugs prescribed to treat severe pain. They work in the brain to diminish the perception of pain by depressing the central nervous system (CNS). These drugs also produce a sense of euphoria by affecting pleasure centres in the brain. When not taken exactly as prescribed is can cause death.

**Examples of commonly prescribed opioids:** Narcotics such as morphine and codeine. Oxycontin, Darvon, Vicodin, Dilaudid, Demerol, Lomotil.

Opioids may interact with other medications and are only safe when taken exactly as prescribed. Opioids cannot be used with alcohol, antihistamines, barbiturates or benzodiazepines because these substances slow breathing down and could cause death. Because opioids are depressants and can cause drowsiness, they should be used with caution when driving a vehicle or operating machinery.

Long-term use can lead to physical dependence where the body adapts to the presence of the medication and withdrawal symptoms may occur if stopped suddenly. Long-term effects include severe constipation, decreased sexual drive, menstrual irregularities, and moodiness. Chronic users may also develop serious lung problems. Opioids may be used intravenously therefore; the use of dirty needles or sharing can cause infections such as tetanus, HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection and AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome).

Individuals who become addicted to prescription medication can be treated. All pain does not have to be treated with medication; there are alternatives.