



OPIOIDS



The opioid class of drugs originally comes from opium produced from the poppy plant, and has been in use since as early as 3400 B.C. to treat pain. Opioid drugs have molecules which mimic the shape of naturally-occurring opioid system neurotransmitters in the brain. When these neurotransmitters attach to opioid receptors, they help relieve pain or reinforce behavior by flooding the brain with dopamine which causes feelings of euphoria.

Opioids may be legal and regulated (prescription/medical) or illicit and unregulated (street drugs). They can be taken orally, snorted, smoked or injected. In BC, many are dying because unregulated drugs are being poisoned with fentanyl and other similar drugs.

EFFECTS

People who use opioids report effects like:

- pain relief and sedation, and feelings of euphoria, calm, or relief from anxiety.
- small pupils, loose muscles and slurred speech.
- nausea, constipation, sleepiness, feeling itchy.
- slow breathing, or, in the case of an overdose, stop breathing entirely.

RISKS

- Opioid overdose can be fatal. Risk of overdose increases when opioids are mixed with other drugs.
- Opioids can be very addictive, if someone stops using opioids they experience strong withdrawal symptoms and they feel physically sick.
- Opioids from the unregulated (illegal) market are unpredictable and often stronger than expected making it difficult to know how much you are taking.

HARM REDUCTION TIPS

- Know the signs of an opioid overdose and how to respond.
- Abstinence is the most effective way to reduce the risk of harm; but if that's not for you, delaying use until at least age 18 can reduce the risks.
- If you are going to use opioids
 - avoid using other people's prescriptions. If you have a prescription - follow the directions.
 - start low and go slow - this means using a small amount and waiting for effects to occur before using any more.
 - avoid using opioids with other drugs including alcohol.
- Get your substance checked if using illicit (street) drugs.
- Use a buddy system and look out for each other.

Want more info on opioids? Check out [Dance Safe](#).



Interior Health