

## Protecting Dental Patients From the Dangers of Opioids

You can manage most dental pain with pain relievers that you buy without a prescription—such as ibuprofen (Advil) and aspirin. But for severe pain, some doctors prescribe opioids such as oxycodone (OxyContin) or hydrocodone/acetaminophen (Vicodin, Lorcet).

Dentists write about 1 out of every 10 prescriptions dispensed for the most common type of opioids (called immediate-release opioids). **A study of 822 dentists found that those who prescribed opioids the most often were the least likely to follow safe prescribing practices.**



Your dentist is part of the National Dental Practice-Based Research Network, a group of dental practices that treat patients and also do dental research. For more information go to [www.nationaldentalpbrn.org](http://www.nationaldentalpbrn.org).



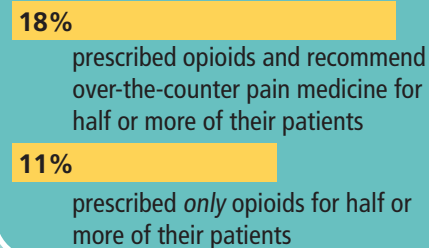
### How dentists should protect patients from opioids

Opioids can have serious side effects and risks, including abuse, addiction, and overdose. Always consider non-opioid pain management, where appropriate. When prescribing opioids, dentists should:

- Screen patients for current misuse and abuse of prescribed (and illicit) opioids
- Check the state Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP), a database where health care providers can see patients' other prescriptions
- Instruct patients to store their prescription out of reach of others and to get rid of extra pills by returning them to the pharmacy or, if that's not an option, flushing them down the toilet.

### How dentists treat pain

The majority of dentists in the study rarely or seldom prescribed opioids. However:



### Percentage of dentists who consistently educate their patients about:

- Side effects of opioids: 50%
- Risks of misusing and sharing opioids: 27%
- How to store opioids securely: 18%
- Importance of securely disposing unused opioids: 13%

**More than 40 people die every day from overdoses involving prescription opioids.**

—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



### What patients should do

If your dentist prescribes you opioids, be sure to ask:

- Why do I need this medication? Is there something safer I could take?
- How long should I take this medication and how do I stop using it safely?
- Are you prescribing the lowest dose and the fewest number of pills that I need?
- How can I reduce the risk of potential side effects?
- What if I have a history of addiction?

### Learn more about:

What to ask your doctor before taking opioids—  
[www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm529517.htm](http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm529517.htm)

Opioid abuse and addiction—  
[medlineplus.gov/opioidabuseandaddiction.html](http://medlineplus.gov/opioidabuseandaddiction.html)

Opioids for dental patients—  
[www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/o/opioids](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/o/opioids)