

# Medical Risks of Long-term Opioid Use



Medical risk	How common?	Description and information
<b>Respiratory depression</b>		
Opioid overdose	< 1% per year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Caused by severely slowed breathing, which you may not notice</li> <li>- Severe cases are treated in the hospital</li> <li>- Can cause death</li> </ul>
Breathing problems during sleep	25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can cause or worsen sleep apnea</li> <li>- You may not notice breathing problems</li> </ul>
<b>Falls, fractures</b>		
Falls causing hip & pelvis fractures	1 - 2% per year	
<b>Gastrointestinal</b>		
Constipation	30 - 40%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It helps to use stool-softeners or medicines that stimulate bowel movements</li> </ul>
Serious intestinal blockage	<1% per year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Caused by severe constipation</li> <li>- Severe cases are treated in the hospital</li> </ul>
<b>Hormonal effects</b>		
Hypogonadism, impotence, infertility, osteoporosis	25% - 75%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Hypogonadism</i> = lowered sex hormones, which can worsen sexual function</li> <li>- <i>Osteoporosis</i> can make you more likely to fracture or break a bone</li> </ul>
<b>Cognitive and neurophysiologic effects</b>		
Sedation	15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can cause difficulty driving and thinking clearly</li> </ul>
Disruption of sleep	25%	
Hyperalgesia	Not known	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Hyperalgesia</i> = being more sensitive to pain</li> </ul>
<b>Psychosocial</b>		
Depression, anxiety, deactivation, apathy	30 - 40%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can cause loss of interest in usual activities, which can lead to depression. Depression can worsen pain, just as pain can worsen depression.</li> </ul>
Addiction, Misuse & Diversion	5 - 30%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Misuse or overdose can occur if others—including children and teens—gain access to the medicine. Your pharmacist can tell you how to dispose of unused medicines safely.</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>		
Dry mouth that may cause tooth decay	25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brush your teeth and rinse your mouth often</li> <li>- Chew sugarless gum and drink water or sugar-free, non-carbonated fluids</li> </ul>
Myoclonus	Not known	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Myoclonus</i> = muscle twitching</li> </ul>