

Staying Safe While Managing Pain and Anxiety

Important Information for Patients and Families



Some people take opioid pain medicines and benzodiazepine medicines for anxiety or sleep. Taking these medicines together can be dangerous. This handout explains how to stay safe.

Taking certain medicines together can be dangerous.

Opioids and benzodiazepines both work by slowing the body down. When taken together, they can slow or stop your breathing. This can cause serious harm or death, even when taken as prescribed.

What you can do to stay safe:

- Ask your doctor if you can avoid taking opioids and benzodiazepines at the same time.
- Never drink alcohol while taking these medicines.
- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed.
- Tell your doctors and pharmacists about every medicine you take.
- Talk to your doctor before you stop taking a medicine.

Call 911 right away if someone has:

- Slow or labored breathing
- Trouble waking up or extreme sleepiness
- Confusion or slurred speech
- Blue or gray lips or fingernails

Ask about naloxone.

Naloxone is a medicine that can reverse an opioid overdose. It can save your or your loved one's life. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if naloxone is right for you or your family.

Safer options may be available.

Many people can manage pain, anxiety, or sleep problems with other treatments. These may include non-opioid medicines, therapy, physical therapy, relaxation, or counseling. Talk with your doctor about which alternatives may be right for you.

Remember:

The danger comes from the medicine combination, not the person taking it. Even people who have taken these medicines for a long time can be at risk.

Questions?

Learn more about safe medicine usage at:

- [cms.gov](https://www.cms.gov)
- [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)
- [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov)
- [nida.nih.gov](https://www.nida.nih.gov)
- [va.gov](https://www.va.gov)