

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT: **TAPERING OFF OPIOIDS**



## **WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?**

Opioids are powerful medicines that help you manage your pain. Common opioid pain medicines are Oxycontin®, Vicodin®, and Percocet®. Check with your doctor to find out if you have an opioid prescription.



## **WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL PAIN TREATMENT GOALS?**

Discuss your pain management plan with your provider and take notes here.

## **WHAT IS TAPERING?**

Tapering is the slow reduction in the dose of a medicine over weeks or months. Tapering is sometimes needed in order to reduce the symptoms of opioid withdrawal and to make life easier to manage.

## **WON'T I FEEL MORE PAIN AFTER TAPERING?**

At the start of tapering, pain may temporarily increase. But alternative pain treatments may be added which can reduce this pain.

For more information visit: <http://www.healthvermont.gov/RxAware>

### **I NEED MY MEDICINE, SO WHY TAPER?**

There are many ways to relieve pain that do not involve opioid medications, even for people with chronic pain. Opioids are very powerful and they can reduce and mask pain, but they do not cure pain. We are learning more and more about the best way to manage chronic pain, and it turns out that in the long run people taking chronic opioids can actually do worse. The longer you use opioids, the less effective they are, and the higher dosage you need to get the same effect. In addition, the higher your dosage, the greater your risk for becoming physically dependent on your medicine, which can make you feel worse and increase your pain.

### **BUT HOW CAN I MANAGE MY PAIN WITHOUT OPIOIDS?**

There are many ways to manage pain without medications at all, let alone opioid medicines. Your provider can review all these options with you. Some ways to manage pain are:

- Non-medication options, like ice, heat, massage, exercise, stretching, yoga
- Non-opioid medicines (oral and topical), like acetaminophen, ibuprofen, cyclobenzaprine, lidocaine ointment
- Slow tapering, dose reduction, or continuation of opioids, if clinically indicated

Many of these pain treatment options can be used at the same time, alternating one method with another (for example, max-dose acetaminophen every 6 hours staggered with ice or heat every 4 hours).

Newer treatments are being developed by pain specialists all the time. There may be an approach for you that can really work.

Tapering should be done under close supervision and support of your provider. You will not be asked to go it alone.

### **WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM TAPERING?**

You may experience a temporary increase in pain as well as some withdrawal symptoms which may include:

- Sweats
- Nausea
- Itching
- Diarrhea
- Restlessness
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Anxiety
- Depression



**Do NOT return to previous dosage while tapering. This increases your risk of experiencing an overdose.**