



American Council for Drug Education, an affiliate of Phoenix House
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BASIC FACTS ABOUT DRUGS: OxyContin

What is OxyContin?

OxyContin is the brand name for an opioid analgesic containing the active ingredient Oxycodone (also found in Percoset and Percodan). OxyContin is a legal narcotic (or a controlled substance) that is available, by prescription, to treat severe pain. OxyContin is a controlled-release medication that, when used correctly, provides extended relief of pain associated with cancer, back pain, or arthritis. However, often when the drug is abused, the tablets are crushed and snorted, chewed, or mixed with water and injected- eliminating the time-release factor and allowing for a quick and intense rush to the brain. This practice can lead to overdosing on OxyContin's active ingredient, oxycodone, by releasing too much of the medication into the bloodstream too quickly. OxyContin is highly addictive - so higher doses of the drug must be taken when a tolerance develops. Illicit users of the drug have risen drastically and steadily over the last few years.

What are the street names?

OxyContin is also known as Oxy, OxyCotton, Oxy 80 (for the 80mg dose), or OC

What does OxyContin look like?

OxyContin most commonly exists in tablet form. These round pills come in 10mg, 20mg, 40mg, and 80mg dosages. OxyContin also comes in capsule or liquid form.



How is it taken?

When used correctly, prescribed patients take the pill orally every 12 hours as needed (most pain relievers last only 3-6 hours). Those who abuse OxyContin remove the time-release coating on the pills. Often the pills are crushed and the powder is snorted, chewed, or cooked to inject.

Short-term effects

The most serious risk associated with OxyContin, is respiratory depression. Because of this, OxyContin should not be combined with other substances that slow down breathing, such as alcohol, antihistamines (like some cold or allergy medication), barbiturates, or benzodiazepines. Other common side effects include constipation, nausea, sedation, dizziness, vomiting, headache, dry mouth, sweating, and weakness. Toxic overdose and/or death can occur by taking the tablet broken, chewed, or crushed. People who abuse the drug (by removing the time-release coating) will experience effects for up to 5 hours. The high that is felt is opiate-like - a sedate, euphoric feeling.

Long-Term Effects

Using OxyContin chronically can result in increased tolerance to the drug in which higher doses of the medication must be taken to receive the initial effect. Over time, OxyContin will become physically addictive, causing a person to experience withdrawal symptoms when the drug is not present. Symptoms of withdrawal include restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, cold flashes with goose bumps, and involuntary leg movements.