

## Opioids

# Language of Substance Use Disorder

The way in which we talk about substance misuse and substance use disorder matters. If used positively, our language can help reduce the stigma often experienced by people who use drugs.

## Opioids 101

- **Good Samaritan Laws:** Laws that provide criminal, civil, or professional liability protections for individuals responding to an overdose.<sup>1</sup> Learn about [Minnesota's Good Samaritan Law](#)
- **Opioids:** Class of drugs that includes heroin and prescription pain relievers. Opioids are often prescribed after surgery or injury, or to relieve cancer pain. Common types of opioids include oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), morphine, fentanyl, and methadone.<sup>1</sup>
- **Opiate:** Naturally-occurring substance that produces euphoria, derived from opium, a poppy plant.<sup>1</sup>
- **Narcotics:** A term used by law enforcement to reference illicit substances and controlled substances being used or sold for nonmedical purposes.
- **Heroin:** Highly addictive illegal opiate that creates a surge of euphoria; processed from morphine, it can potentially cause slow respiratory distress, coma, or death.<sup>1</sup>
- **Fentanyl:** A powerful synthetic opioid pain reliever similar to morphine but stronger than both morphine and heroin. Sometimes mixed with street heroin or cocaine to increase euphoric effects, it is known as a possible cause for the increase in accidental overdose deaths.<sup>1</sup>
- **Synthetic Opioids:** Opioids created chemically in a laboratory (fentanyl, methadone).<sup>1</sup>

For more information, see [Fentanyl 101](#)

<sup>1</sup> From [SAMHSA's Center for the Application of Prevention Technology's Opioid Misuse and Overdose Glossary of Terms \(PDF\)](#)

## Substance Use and Misuse

- **Overdose:** Injury to the body (poisoning) that happens when a drug is taken in excessive amounts. An overdose can be fatal or nonfatal.<sup>1</sup>
- **Non-Medical Use of Prescription Drugs:** Use of prescription opioids for reasons or in ways other than as prescribed, or without a prescription.<sup>2</sup>

## LANGUAGE OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

- **Substance Misuse:** The use of a substance for a purpose not consistent with legal or medical guidelines.<sup>2</sup> Avoid terms like ‘drug abuse’.
- **Tolerance:** The body’s ability to process and experience the effects of a certain amount of a substance. As opioid use increases or decreases, so too does a person’s level of tolerance to opioids.<sup>2</sup>
- **Withdrawal:** Symptoms that can occur after long-term use of a drug is reduced or stopped; these symptoms occur if tolerance to a substance has occurred, and vary according to substance. Withdrawal symptoms can include negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, or depression, as well as physical effects such as nausea, vomiting, muscle aches, and cramping, among others. Withdrawal symptoms often lead a person to use the substance again.<sup>3</sup>
- **Regulated Substance Use:** The use or misuse of substances by an individual who regulates the frequency and quantity of their use with the intent to prevent symptoms of substance use disorder.
- **Substance Dependence:** A need for repeated doses of a drug to feel good or to avoid feeling bad.<sup>2</sup> A formal diagnosis of substance dependence is called substance use disorder. Avoid terms like ‘drug addiction’.
- **Substance Use Disorder:** A formal diagnosis of substance dependence is called substance use disorder. Avoid terms such as ‘drug addict’ and ‘substance abuse’.
- **Harm Reduction:** Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm Reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs.<sup>4</sup>
- **Abstinence from Substances:** When a person is not using any controlled or illicit substances, they are abstinent from substances. Avoid terms such as ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’ to refer to someone’s current state of substance use.

For more information, see [Identification of Substance Use Disorder](#)

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from [CDC Commonly Used Opioid Terms](#)

<sup>2</sup> From [SAMHSA's Center for the Application of Prevention Technology's Opioid Misuse and Overdose Glossary of Terms \(PDF\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from [National Institute on Drug Abuse Commonly Used Terms in Addiction Science](#)

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from [Principles of Harm Reduction](#)

## Clinical Terms

- **Naloxone:** Medication (opioid antagonist) administered to rapidly reverse opioid overdose. Naloxone is commonly sold under the brand names Narcan® and Evzio®. It is available through injectors (intermuscular or IM), nasal sprays, and auto-injectors.<sup>1</sup>
- **Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT):** Integrates medications (e.g., methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone) with behavioral therapies and medications to treat substance use disorders.<sup>1</sup>
- **Benzodiazepines:** Class of drug used mainly as tranquilizers to control symptoms of anxiety. Like opioids, benzodiazepines depress breathing. Taking opioids and benzodiazepines together can increase the risk for overdose.<sup>1</sup>
- **Analgesics:** a group of drugs used to achieve analgesia, or relief from pain.
- **Agonist:** a drug that activates certain receptors and mimics natural chemical response in the brain. Full agonist opioids activate the opioid receptors in the brain fully, resulting in the full opioid effect (e.g. heroin, oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, opium).
- **Antagonist:** a drug that blocks opioids by attaching to the opioid receptors without activating them. Antagonists cause no opioid effect and block full agonist opioids (e.g. naltrexone, naloxone).
- **Partial agonist:** a drug that activates the opioid receptors in the brain, but to a much lesser degree than a full agonist to prevent withdrawal and cravings (e.g. buprenorphine, butorphanol).
- **Mixed agonist/antagonist:** a drug that acts as an antagonist, blocking some opioids, and also acts as an agonist, activating opioid receptors in the brain to a much lesser degree than a full agonist (e.g. buprenorphine/naloxone).
- **Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs):** Electronic databases that track and house data on prescriptions and dispensations of controlled substances with the purpose of preventing individuals from receiving medically unnecessary prescriptions that may be abused or cause overdoses.<sup>1</sup> Learn about [Minnesota's PDMP](#).

<sup>1</sup> From [SAMHSA's Center for the Application of Prevention Technology's Opioid Misuse and Overdose Glossary of Terms \(PDF\)](#)

## Street Names for Opioids

The common opioids have many street names, including, but not limited to:

- **Heroin:** Dope, Smack, H, Train, Black Tar, China, White Horse, Junk, Judas, Boy
- **Fentanyl or fentanyl-laced heroin:** Apache, TNT, China Girl, White China, Tango and Cash, Murder
- **Morphine:** Morph, Miss Emma, M
- **Codeine:** Cody, Captain Cody, Schoolboy
- **Hydrocodone:** Vike, Vic, Watson-387, Norco
- **Oxycodone:** Percs, Cets, Oxy, OC, Hillbilly Heroin, Roxy, Kicker

- **Hydromorphone:** Dust, Juice, Dillies, Smack
- **Benzodiazepines:** Downers, Sleeping Pills, Tranks, Chill Pills, Z-bar, Bricks, Benzos

## For the Media

How journalists and members of the media talk about substance use, misuse and substance use disorder can impact perceptions of people who use drugs.

Visit [Changing the Narrative's website](#) to learn more about how to incorporate accurate, humane and scientifically-backed language relating to substance use in reporting.

Please visit the [Opioid Dashboard](#) for more information on opioid overdose death, nonfatal overdose, use, misuse, substance use disorder, prescribing practices, supply, diversion, harm reduction, co-occurring conditions, and social determinants of health.

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<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/opioids/basics/languagesud.html>

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