



# Opioid Medicines and Sleep: What You Need to Know

When people take pain medicines called opioids most days for more than three months, it can cause problems with sleeping. These medicines can make breathing slower and affect how well a person sleeps.

## Sleep Problems Caused by Opioid Medicines

- People might experience:
  - Loud snoring
  - Breathing very slowly while sleeping
  - Trouble breathing during sleep
  - Not getting enough deep sleep

## How Can Clinicians Help?

- Clinicians can ask patients about their sleep to make sure they're staying healthy.
- Clinicians must be careful about giving these medicines to people who have breathing problems during sleep. If opioids are needed, clinicians should give patients naloxone to help in case of an overdose.<sup>1</sup>
- Clinicians might<sup>2</sup>:
  - Order testing to check for sleep-disordered breathing
  - Prescribe appropriate treatments to improve sleep and sleep-disordered breathing
  - Collaborate across specialties (e.g., primary care, pain medicine, and sleep medicine) to promote better sleep and patient-centered care

## Important Note

If patients take opioid medicines, advise that they always talk to their health care provider about how they are sleeping and feeling.

## Tips for Better Sleep with Opioids<sup>3</sup>

### Mindfulness →

Paying attention to the present moment

*Example: Taking slow, deep breaths and noticing how your body feels while sitting still*

### Physical Therapies →

Body treatments to help you feel better

*Example: Stretching or massage to ease tight muscles*

### Physical Activity →

Encourage your patient to move their body to stay healthy

*Example: Going for a walk or riding your bike*

### Sleep Hygiene Information →

Tips for better sleep

*Example: Turning off screens an hour before bedtime to help your brain relax*

### Sleep Restriction →

Limiting time in bed to improve sleep

*Example: Only going to bed when you're really sleepy instead of lying awake for hours*

### Stimulus Control →

Encourage your patient to change things around them to sleep better

*Example: Using your bed for sleep and not for work or watching TV*

### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) →

Encourage your patient to train their brain to think in healthier ways

*Example: If you're scared of making a mistake,*

<sup>1</sup> Dowell, D., Ragan, K. R., Jones, C. M., Baldwin, G. T., & Chou, R. (2022). CDC Clinical Practice Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Pain—United States, 2022. *MMWR Recommendations and Reports*, 71(3), 1–95. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.rr7103a1>

<sup>2</sup> Rosen, I. M., Aurora, R. N., Kirsch, D. B., Carden, K. A., Malhotra, R. K., Ramar, K., Abbasi-Feinberg, F., Kristo, D. A., Martin, J. L., Olson, E. J., Rosen, C. L., Rowley, J. A., & Shelgikar, A. V. (2019). Chronic Opioid Therapy and Sleep: An American Academy of Sleep Medicine Position Statement. *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, 15(11), 1671–1673. <https://doi.org/10.5664/jcsm.8062>

<sup>3</sup> Whale, K., & Gooberman-Hill, R. (2022). The importance of sleep for people with chronic pain: Current insights and evidence. *JBMR Plus*, 6(7). <https://doi.org/10.1002/jbm4.10658>