



Jackson County Department of Public Health

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PREVENTING OPIOID MISUSE

In order to turn the curve on the opioid epidemic, preventing opioid misuse is key. Many people live with chronic pain that is debilitating in their daily lives and they may be prescribed opioid pain relievers to help manage this pain. Opioids are a short-term solution to an often long-term problem and they carry lots of risks. If you are in need of pain management, it is vital that you speak with your doctor about all options and consider alternatives to taking opioids. Discuss any and all side effects and concerns and be sure to follow up with your doctor regularly.

For individuals who are prescribed opioids, be sure to take and store them properly. Never take in greater quantity or more often than prescribed. Make sure your doctor is aware of any other medications you are taking, and avoid taking opioids with any other substance such as alcohol. It is very dangerous to combine opioids with other drugs, especially those that cause drowsiness. Never share or sell your opioids. To avoid others misusing opioids, store your prescription in a secure place out of reach of others. Considering keeping a locked medication box. If you have unused opioids when you are done with treatment, dispose of them properly by dropping them off at a medication drop box. In Jackson County, there are drop boxes at the Sheriff's Office and Walgreens, both in Sylva.

It is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of opioid misuse. Possible signs include spending time alone and avoiding family and friends, changing friend groups, losing interest in activities, poor hygiene, acting sad and tired, changes in appetite, increase in energy with fast talking, irritability, mood swings, missing important events or appointments, attending work/school erratically, getting into trouble and/or arrested, and financial hardship.

Educate yourself on the signs of an opioid overdose and what you can do to prevent overdose, especially if a loved one is prescribed or uses opioids illegally. Signs may include unresponsiveness, slow or shallow breathing, constricted pupils, blue fingernails or lips due to low oxygen, vomiting, or gurgling noises. There are ways you can equip yourself to help in the event of an opioid overdose. Naloxone, according to NCDHHS, is an FDA-approved medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose by blocking receptors in the brain and restoring breathing. Naloxone can be administered intramuscularly or with a nasal spray (Narcan), after first calling 911. Naloxone is effective against opioids, fentanyl, and heroin, though in some cases multiple doses may be required. Always call 911 if someone is experiencing an overdose because they will need additional care. Naloxone is available under a statewide standing order, without a prescription, at the majority of retail pharmacies in North Carolina and is covered by most insurances. Consider keeping Naloxone on hand, especially if a loved one is struggling with opioid substance use disorder. To learn more about Naloxone administration and where it is available, visit www.naloxonesaves.org.

If you or someone you love are experiencing an opioid substance use disorder, help is available. Speaking with your doctor is a great place to start and you can request a referral to a substance use



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professional. Further, anyone can call the SAMHSA National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). For North Carolina residents, <https://www.morepowerfulnc.org/get-help/finding-treatment/> has great resources for finding treatment options, including crisis lines, information on choosing a treatment option, insurance coverage, information for pregnant women, and more.

For parents and guardians, educate the children in your care about the highly addictive and dangerous nature of opioids so that they understand what opioids are and the risks they involve. Because opioids are often in a prescribed pill form, there is a common misconception that taking them is safer than other drugs. Visit credible resources such as www.drugabuse.gov for tips on how to talk to your children about opioids.

Remind yourself, and others, that regardless of how or why a person misuses opioids, they are first and foremost a person. They are someone's child, they may be a parent, they are friends, family, and they are loved. Improving the opioid epidemic will take compassion and care from us all. For more information on the opioid epidemic in North Carolina, visit the North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition website at www.nchrc.org. To get involved, contact Janelle Messer at (828) 587-8238 or janellemesser@jacksonnc.org.

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