

# Stopping Chronic Opioid Therapy Has Risks

(Use caution when  
deciding to fill or  
refuse an Rx)



# OPIOID TAPERING AND DISCONTINUATION

## WHAT IS THE RISK?

- Overdose death and suicide are more common when chronic opioid therapy is discontinued than when opioid therapy is maintained;<sup>1,2</sup> tapering is associated with a small absolute increase in the risk of overdose or suicide<sup>3</sup>
- The risk of death after stopping opioids increases with longer treatment duration and is highest immediately after discontinuation<sup>2</sup>
- Patients on stable, longer-term, higher-dose opioid therapy have an increased risk of mental health crisis (e.g., depression, anxiety, suicide attempt) encounters with opioid tapering, which increases with faster tapering<sup>4</sup>
- Rapid reduction or abrupt discontinuation of high-dose, long-term opioid therapy increases the risk of overdose and incident OUD<sup>5</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The 2022 CDC guideline recommends continuing opioids when benefits outweigh risks; detailed advice is provided for gradual, patient-centered tapering when risks outweigh benefits<sup>6</sup>
- The FDA has issued a warning against sudden discontinuation of opioid pain medicines:<sup>7</sup>
  - Do not abruptly discontinue opioid analgesics in patients physically dependent on opioids
  - Counsel patients not to discontinue their opioids without first discussing the need for a gradual tapering regimen
  - There are no standard opioid tapering schedules that are suitable for all patients. Create a patient-specific plan and ensure ongoing monitoring and support

## REFERENCES

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6. Dowell D, et al. *MMWR Recomm Rep.* 2022;71(No. RR-3):1-95;
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