



## FACT SHEET 1

# How do I know if the person I'm caring for is taking opioid medicines?

The use of opioid medicines has been increasing in Australia.

Opioid medicines are the strongest medicines you can get to relieve pain. They can be prescribed following a surgery or injury, for specific medical conditions, as well as in cancer treatment and palliative (end of life) care.

Opioids are powerful medicines, so it's important to know if the person you're caring for is taking them. This way you can **support them to take their medicines safely** ([see Factsheet 2](#)).

Opioid medicines are only available with a prescription. You can't buy them over the counter from a pharmacy. There have been some recent changes to the way people can get their opioid medicines in Australia. You can read more about those changes in [Factsheet 4: Will the person I'm caring for still have access to opioid medicines?](#)

While the doctor or pharmacist will usually explain that the prescribed pain medicine contains opioids, research shows that many people are taking opioids without realising.

Because of this, people may take opioids in an unsafe way without understanding the consequences.

## Here are 4 ways you can find out if the person you're caring for is taking opioid medicines.



### 1. Ask the person you're caring for

As a carer, you'll usually know if the person you are caring for is taking pain medication. But, you may not know if their medication contains opioids. It's good to find out then you can help them take their medications safely and avoid any risks.

If you don't know whether the person you're caring for is taking medications, ask them. They may not know if their medicine contains opioids as these are often described by the ingredient. See point number 2.



### 2. Check the ingredients

There are many different brand names for various opioid medicines. It's best to check the packet for the 'active ingredient'.

If the medicine contains one of the following active ingredients, it will be classed as opioid medicine.

1. Fentanyl
2. Buprenorphine
3. Hydromorphone
4. Methadone
5. Oxycodone
6. Morphine
7. Pethidine
8. Tapentadol
9. Tramadol
10. Codeine

You can read more about these different ingredients on the [Healthdirect](#) website or the NPS MedicineWise [Medicine Finder](#).

Opioid medicines can come in different forms, but they are usually tablets or skin patches.



### 3. Ask the doctor or pharmacist

You can be a great support for the person you care for by attending doctors' appointments and pharmacy visits with them.

The person you care for has the right to ask the doctor or pharmacist about the medicines they have been prescribed. Talk to them about whether the medicines contain opioids, and what any side effects and risks might be.

You can also ask about the best way to **support the person you care for to take their opioid medicines safely** ([see factsheet 2](#)).



### 4. Reach out

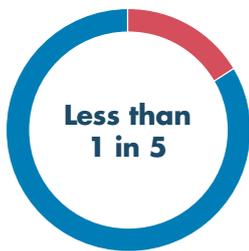
Remember to seek support if you have any questions about opioid medicines.

Call the Medicines Line (1300 633 424) or speak to your pharmacist. They are trained health professionals who can answer your questions and make sure you have the information you need. There is no question too big or small!

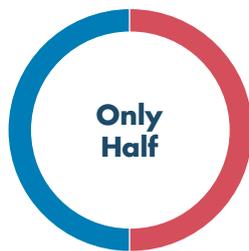
It's important you feel comfortable, so you can support the person you care for to take their opioid medicines safely.

## Confused about opioids?

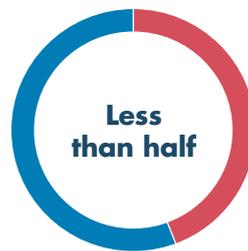
A recent study in Australia showed there's a lack of knowledge about opioids:



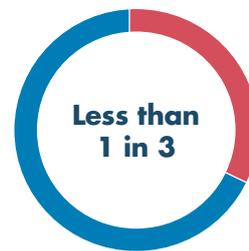
**Less than 1 in 5** people using opioids take them in a safe and effective way.



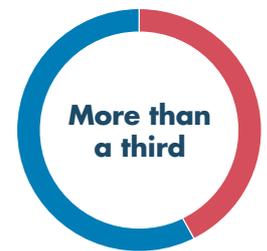
**Only half** of current opioid users knew they were taking an opioid medication.



**Less than half** knew all of their current opioid medications were opioids.



**Less than 1 in 3** people look for information about opioids after they are prescribed.



**More than a third** of Australians do not know what opioids are.

## Taking opioids safely

Opioids are generally prescribed with information about safe and effective use. As a carer, you may already know how much and when the person you're caring for should be taking their opioids. If you're unsure, it's worth checking in.

Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) leaflets are good sources of information for each medicine. Ask for one from the treating doctor or pharmacist or by using the NPS Medicine Wise Medicine Finder at <https://www.nps.org.au/medicine-finder>.

You may find that the person you're caring for is getting good pain relief with opioids. However, it's important to know that an individual may get used to opioids if taken over a long time. If this happens, they can feel the need to take more and more to get the same pain relief first experienced. Taking higher doses can cause dependence and addiction.

If you're not sure whether the person you're caring for is using opioids safely, find out some of the signs in [Factsheet 3: How can I identify if a person I'm caring for is not using their opioid medicines safely?](#)

Keep talking to the person you care for about their pain. There may be other options to relieve pain. Look at the Health Direct website for more information: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/options-for-managing-chronic-pain>

**Remember! Seek support from your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions about how to help someone take their opioid medicines.**

Visit the Carer Gateway website at <https://www.carergateway.gov.au/help-advice> or call them on 1800 422 737 to find local services and support for carers.

All factsheets referenced above can be found at <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/opioids-information/caring-for-someone-living-with-pain>.