Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Naloxone (Narcan®)

This information explains what naloxone (Narcan) is and when to use it.

If you're taking opioids, it's important that the people you live with know when and how to use naloxone. Ask everyone to read the instructions that come with your prescription. They should also know where to find it in your home in case you need it.

What is naloxone and what is it used for?

Naloxone is a medicine that can reverse or block the effects of an opioid overdose. An opioid overdose is when your breathing slows down or stops. This happens if you take more opioids than your healthcare provider prescribes you.

Why do I need naloxone?

If you're prescribed opioids, you may also get a prescription for naloxone. Opioids are strong painkillers prescribed to help with moderate to severe pain. Using them too much or in the wrong way can lead to a strong, harmful need to keep using them. To learn more, read *Safe Opioid Use: What You Need to Know* (www.mskcc.org/pe/opioids).

If you follow your healthcare provider's instructions for taking opioids, you will not need to use naloxone. But we want to make sure you have it in case of an emergency.

When should I use naloxone?

Use naloxone during an emergency. An emergency is when someone shows signs of an overdose after they take more opioids than prescribed.

Signs of an opioid overdose include:

- Slow or stopped breathing.
- The person does not respond even when you shake them or call their name.
- Blue, gray, or white lips and fingernails.
- Tiny pupils (dark dot in the center of the eye).
- Snoring or gurgling sounds.

Always call 911 after using naloxone.

Naloxone effects only last 30 to 90 minutes, and you may need more medical care. If you're unsure if you should use naloxone, call 911, and follow the operator's instructions.

How do I use naloxone?

Naloxone comes as a nasal (nose) spray or an injection (shot). It will come with instructions on how to use it. Follow the instructions that come with it and call 911.

Where can I get naloxone?

If prescribed opioids, you may also get a prescription for naloxone.

You can also buy naloxone without a prescription from your local pharmacy. Ask a pharmacy employee for help.

Does my insurance cover naloxone?

Check with your insurance provider to find out if naloxone is covered or the amount of your co-pay.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

About Naloxone (Narcan®) - Last updated on July 16, 2026

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