

# Oxycodone ●

## What is oxycodone?

Oxycodone hydrochloride is part of a group of drugs known as opioids. Opioids interact with opioid receptors in the brain and elicit a range of responses within the body, from feelings of pain relief, to relaxation, pleasure and contentment.

Oxycodone is most commonly prescribed by doctors to relieve moderate to severe pain. However, there is increasing concern among medical professionals about the risks of using these drugs, particularly when they are used for a long time.

Under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), oxycodone is a Schedule 8 drug. Doctors must follow state and territory laws when prescribing oxycodone and must notify, or receive approval from, the appropriate health authority.

Some people misuse oxycodone to become intoxicated, which can result in serious side effects.

### Types of oxycodone

Oxycodone comes in a number of forms including capsules, tablets, liquid and suppositories. It also comes in a variety of strengths.

### Common oxycodone brand names

Oxynorm®, OxyContin®, Endone®, Proladone®, Targin®.

### Slang names

Hillbilly heroin, oxy, OC and O.

### How are they used?

Oxycodone is usually swallowed but is sometimes injected or used as a suppository.

To prevent OxyContin® tablets being injected by people who misuse them, they were reformulated in 2014. The tablets are now resistant to crushing and become a thick gel when added to water. They also have controlled release properties, even as a gel. Read more about this change on the ReGen website at [regen.org.au/news/451-oxychanges](http://regen.org.au/news/451-oxychanges).

## Effects of oxycodone

Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug and follow your doctor's prescription. Contact your doctor if you are concerned about the side effects of oxycodone.

Oxycodone affects everyone differently, but the effects may include:

- pain relief
- dizziness or faintness
- tiredness
- confusion and difficulty concentrating
- euphoria or negative mood
- restlessness

- stiff muscles
- constipation
- dry mouth
- stomach ache and nausea
- difficulty urinating
- slow pulse
- excess sweating, flushing and itching
- mild allergic rash or hives (see your doctor promptly).<sup>1</sup>

If injecting drugs there is an increased risk of:

- tetanus
- infection
- vein damage.

If sharing needles there is an increased risk of:

- hepatitis B
- hepatitis C
- HIV and AIDS.

Injecting drugs repeatedly and sharing injecting equipment with other people increases the risk of experiencing these effects.

### Overdose

If you take a large amount of oxycodone, you could overdose. If you have any of the symptoms below, call an ambulance straight away by dialling triple zero (000). Ambulance officers don't need to involve the police. If possible, have the medicine with you so the ambulance officers know what has been taken:

- chest pain or discomfort
- small pupils
- decreased awareness or responsiveness
- extreme drowsiness and loss of consciousness
- no muscle tone or movement
- slow or irregular heartbeat.<sup>1</sup>

For information on overdose, go to:  
[adf.org.au/insights/overdose/](http://adf.org.au/insights/overdose/)

### Long-term effects

Regular use of oxycodone may cause:

- dental problems<sup>2</sup>
- mood swings
- reduced sex drive and decreased level of testosterone (males) and menstrual problems (females)
- needing to use more to get the same effect
- financial, work or social problems.<sup>3</sup>

### Using oxycodone with other drugs

Regular use of oxycodone may cause:

- **oxycodone + alcohol:** increased confusion and clumsiness, and breathing difficulties.
- **oxycodone + some antidepressants (monoamine oxidase inhibitors – MAOIs):** delirium, convulsions, respiratory failure, coma and death.<sup>4</sup>

## Withdrawal

Giving up oxycodone after using it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. This is why it's important to seek advice from a health professional when planning to stop taking oxycodone, whether you have been taking it with a prescription or not.

Withdrawal symptoms vary from person to person and are different depending on the type of oxycodone taken. Symptoms usually last for approximately one week and can include:

- watering eyes
- runny nose
- uncontrollable yawning
- difficulty sleeping and severe restlessness
- hot and cold flushes
- pains in muscles and joints
- muscle spasms and tremors
- loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting
- increased heart rate and blood pressure
- uncontrolled kicking movements.<sup>3</sup>

Find out more about withdrawal at  
[adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/withdrawal/](http://adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/withdrawal/)

## Getting help

If your use of oxycodone is affecting your health, family, relationships, work, school, financial or other life situations, you can seek help and support.

Help and support services directory:  
[adf.org.au/help-support/support-services-directory/](http://adf.org.au/help-support/support-services-directory/)

Information about treatment:  
[adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/treatment/](http://adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/treatment/)

## Oxycodone statistics

### **National**

The amount of oxycodone being prescribed by doctors increased from 97kg in 1997 to 1295kg in 2008.<sup>5</sup>

## Oxycodone and the law

Under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), oxycodone is a Schedule 8 drug. Doctors must follow state and territory laws when prescribing oxycodone and must notify, or receive approval from, the appropriate health authority.

Using oxycodone without a prescription from a doctor, or selling or giving them to someone else, is illegal. There are also laws against forging or altering a prescription or making false representation to obtain oxycodone or a prescription for them from a health professional.

References

1. Mayo Clinic. (2014) Oxycodone (oral route).
2. Migraine Awareness Group. (n.d.) Treatment & Management Drug Profiles: oxycodone HCl, controlled-release OxyContin.
3. Brands, B. Sproule, B. & Marshman, J. (Eds.). (1998). Drugs & drug abuse (3rd ed.). Ontario: Addiction Research Foundation.
4. Upfal J. (2006). The Australian drug guide (7th ed.). Melbourne: Black Inc.
5. Rintoul, A.C., Dobbin, M., Drummer, O.H., & Ozanne-Smith, J. (2011). Increasing deaths involving oxycodone, Victoria, Australia, 2000-09. Injury Prevention, 17(4), 254–259.

Always call an ambulance on triple zero (000) if an overdose is suspected: tell the paramedic exactly what has been taken. Paramedics are there to help and will not involve the police unless there is a danger to themselves or others.

**Other help, support services and resources**

Links to further help and support • [adf.org.au/help-support/](http://adf.org.au/help-support/)

Information on different types of drugs • [adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/effects/drug-types/](http://adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/effects/drug-types/)

● **Further information**

**DrugInfo • 1300 85 85 84**

Free confidential information and advice about alcohol and other drugs (9am - 5pm, Mon-Fri)

**Family Drug Help • 1300 660 068 • [www.familydrughelp.com.au](http://www.familydrughelp.com.au)** (Victorian-based)

Services are available to support those around you who may be affected by your drug use. As well as providing understanding, they can provide information about how best to help during treatment.

**Family Drug Support • 1300 368 186 • [www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)** (Australia-wide)



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