

## Opioids in America

Lately, there's been a big focus on America's opioid addiction in the news. Whether it's news on the abuse of the drug or it's information sharing on how the drug works, Americans are talking about this subject regularly. We want to help educate you on this hot topic.

Opioids are made from the opium poppy plant. Opium has been around since 3,400 BC and it was first referenced as being cultivated in Southwest Asia. The drug traveled the Silk Road from the Mediterranean to Asia to China. Since then, the drug has gained popularity for pain relief but it also has gained notoriety as an abused drug. Morphine, Codeine, and Heroin are all derived from the opium poppy and are all highly addictive drugs that are abused all around the world. As the demand for these drugs has increased, so has the production. From 2016 to 2017, the [area under opium poppy cultivation](#) in Afghanistan increased by 63 percent. In 2016, [it killed some 64,000 Americans](#), more than double the number in 2005.

We can see that the danger from this drug is growing rapidly. What can we do to recognize potential abuse problems and to get help? Here are some facts about opioid addiction:

- How do they work? Opioids attach to pain receptors in your brain, spinal cord, and other areas that recognize pain signals. As they attach to the receptors, it reduces the sending of pain messages to the brain and therefore reduces the feelings of pain in your body.
- Short-acting opiates are typically prescribed for injuries and only for a few days. They take 15-30 minutes for pain relief to begin and this relief lasts for 3-4 hours. Long-acting opiates are prescribed for moderate to severe pain and are used over a long period of time. Relief typically lasts for 8-12 hours and can be used alongside a short-acting drug for breakthrough pain.
- Dependence is common with long-term use of an opiate. This means that the patient needs to take more of and higher doses of the medicine to get the same pain relieving effect. This does not necessarily mean the patient is addicted. Addiction is the abuse of the drug by taking it in an unprescribed way—like crushing tablets or using intravenously.
- Americans account for less than 5% of the world's population, but [take 80% of the world's opioid medications](#). About [5% of the people](#) who take opiates become addicted to the drug.
- Help is available through many channels from private recovery centers to insurance providers. The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) helpline is 1-800-662-HELP. This line is confidential, free, and available 24-hours a day and 7 days a week. Family and friends may also call this number for resources for help. Additional resources can be found at [www.drugabuse.com](http://www.drugabuse.com).

Make sure you are educated about the dangers of opioid abuse. But, don't be discouraged and think that the abuse is incurable! There are many resources that can be used to break the addiction cycle and can make real change in the lives of its victims. Ask for help and offer help.