



Scan here!  
For more information,  
tools, and to  
provide feedback on  
this resource's  
effectiveness.

[linktr.ee/opioideducation\\_prescriber](https://linktr.ee/opioideducation_prescriber)

## PEARLS FOR PRESCRIBERS

# Effective & safe use of opioids for post-surgical pain



### ■ Prior to prescribing opioids:

- Take a pain-focused history, including location, duration, severity, and impact on function
- Perform a physical examination
- Weigh the potential benefits and risks of using opioids to relieve pain
- Screen for previous use of opioids and/or recreational drugs that may increase the risk of opioid use disorder
- Create a multi-modal plan that includes:



**physical strategies**  
(e.g. heat, ice, or positioning)



**psychosocial strategies**  
(e.g. distraction, belly breathing, or mindfulness)



**non-opioid pharmacological strategies**  
(e.g. acetaminophen and/or NSAIDs)





Opioids should only  
be used to treat  
moderate to severe  
pain in children when  
other strategies are  
inadequate to  
manage pain.

### ■ When prescribing opioids:

- Use age-appropriate pain scales to assess and monitor the patient's pain level.
- Use the lowest effective dose of the most appropriate opioid for the shortest duration necessary to manage the child's pain.
- Develop a clear and personalized treatment plan, specifying the type of opioid, dosage, frequency, duration, potential side effects, and follow-up appointments.
- Maintain and document comprehensive records of the assessment, treatment plan, and interactions with the patient and their caregiver.
- Be sensitive to and consider potential (un)conscious biases (See p. 4 of Opioids and Pain in Youth: A toolkit for health professionals).
- Review and comply with section 5.1.6. of the Pediatric Pain Management standard (CAN/HSO 13200:2023) when prescribing opioids as a co-therapy.

## Provide education to patients and caregivers

### Educate patients and caregivers on:






-  **Pain after surgery**  
What to expect, why treating pain is important, and how to assess pain.
-  **Physical & psychosocial interventions**  
Non-pharmacological strategies to reduce pain.
-  **Non-opioid & opioid pharmacotherapy**  
Using the “step-wise” approach, including dosing and discontinuation of medications.
-  **Opioid safety**  
Safe use (including tapering / discontinuation), storage, and disposal of opioids.

### Educated patients and caregivers are more likely to:



- Notice signs of adverse reactions, allowing for quicker medical attention.
- Reduce risks of accidental overdose and other complications.
- Monitor their child's progress, facilitating better pain management and well-being.
- Feel empowered to make informed decisions on pain management.

## Deliver opioid and pain management education based on evidence

### DOS

-  **Respect the patient's and caregiver's privacy.**
  - Choose a private and quiet location, free from distraction for conversations.
  - Maintain a safe space for questions about medications.
-  **Provide contact information.**
  - Give your contact for follow-up questions and support.
-  **Provide education.**
  - Educate patients and/or the caregivers who will be administering medications at home during multiple points of their healthcare journey.
  - Advise that opioids are an effective and safe part of the patient's pain management plan.
-  **Communicate clearly.**
  - Use simple plain language and avoid medical jargon or complex terms.
  - Break down complex concepts into smaller, more manageable parts.
  - Tailor information to your patient's specific needs.
  - Repeat important information to reinforce understanding.
-  **Check that your patient/caregiver(s) understand what you advise.**
  - Ask them open-ended questions to check their understanding.
  - Ask them to summarize the information in their own words.
  - Use visual aids (e.g. diagrams, charts, pictures) as needed.

### DON'TS

-  **Don't assume another member of the health care team will provide all the discharge instructions.**
  - This is the responsibility of every team member!
-  **Don't wait until right before discharge to give medication instructions.**
  - Don't rush patients/caregivers – give them time to ask questions.

**Disclaimer:** This resource is for informational purposes only, it is not meant to replace medical advice from a health professional. If you wish to adapt this resource to use at your own institution, please email [contact@kidsinpain.ca](mailto:contact@kidsinpain.ca) to seek permission.

This information sheet was designed as a companion document to 'Effective and Safe Use of Opioids for Post-Surgical Pain - Information for Caregivers'. The guidance in these documents aligns with section 5 of the Health Standards Organization's Pediatric Pain Management standard (CAN/HSO 13200:2023).

Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.