



# Alternatives to Opioids for Pain Management

**Alternatives to opioid-based pain management can reduce the chances of repeated use, abuse, and overdose. Alternative medical and nonmedical therapies can alleviate chronic and reoccurring pain, and medically assisted treatments can assist those dependent upon opioids.**

Keywords: opioids, alternative treatments, chronic pain, pain management

Although opioids can treat acute and chronic pain, they come with considerable long-term risks, including addiction and overdose. Opioids are not highly effective for treating chronic pain and can increase sensitivity to pain over time. Pain sufferers can better manage opioid dependence by awareness of risks and seeking alternative and complementary pain management strategies. Take charge of your health by being informed and requesting options from your physician, including coupled therapies using opioid and non-opioid pain management strategies, non-drug-based treatments, and joining therapeutic communities when needed.

Consider non-opioid pain management options, including nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs ([NSAIDs](#)), acetaminophen, corticosteroids, muscle relaxants, anti-anxiety, antidepressants, and anticonvulsants. These combinations may allow you to avoid the risks associated with a singular potent opioid pain management strategy<sup>1</sup>. Alternatively, take advantage of non-drug-based pain management, including physical therapy, psychotherapy, relaxation and pain coping skills training, self-hypnosis, chiropractic care, meditation, massage therapy, and exercise. Employing a combination of strategies

When opioid users have become dependent, interventions include medication-assisted therapy (MAT). MATs is the use of the Federal Drug Administration-approved medications, combined with counseling and behavioral therapies, to provide a “whole-patient” approach to treating substance use disorders. Three drugs commonly used to treat addiction are Methadone, Naltrexone, and Buprenorphine. Federal [guidelines](#) and legislation regulate MATs<sup>2</sup>. Further, therapeutic communities are an effective and common form of long-term residential treatment for substance use disorders. These communities can educate and facilitate the combination of alternative pain management strategies.

Contact your primary care physician for help. Your physician will navigate through alternative approaches available to you. Be upfront about your use of legal and illegal forms of opioids. Inform your physician regarding your pain management needs. Volunteering that you are concerned about addiction, have used or abused opioids, or abused other prescription medications can inform your physician recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> Chang, A. K., Bijur, P. E., Esses, D., Barnaby, D. P., & Baer, J. (2017). Effect of a Single Dose of Oral Opioid and Nonopioid Analgesics on Acute Extremity Pain in the Emergency Department: A Randomized Clinical Trial. *Jama*, 318(17), 1661-1667.ama

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment>





Seek out your local evidence-based chronic pain [PATH](#) (Personal Action Towards Health) program<sup>3</sup>; PATH is a six-week self-management series addressing pain, fatigue, and difficult emotions. Other topics include managing symptoms, medications, working with health care providers, relaxation, healthy eating, physical activity, and communicating with family and friends. The Centers for Disease Control self-management education (SME) program can also be a resource for chronic pain management<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mihealthyprograms.org/programs-path.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/learnmorefeelbetter/programs/chronic-pain.htm>