

Opioid Misuse

Recognising dependence, overdose risk and the importance of supported treatment

Substance misuse can develop quietly. A substance may begin as a way to cope, sleep, socialise, manage pain, increase confidence or get through difficult feelings. This guide is here to help you notice patterns with curiosity rather than judgement.

What misuse can look like

Opioids include some prescribed pain medicines as well as illicit opioids. Misuse may involve taking more than intended, using for emotional relief, chasing sedation or euphoria, or continuing despite significant harm.

Overdose risk

Opioids can slow breathing. Risk increases with higher doses and when opioids are combined with alcohol, benzodiazepines or other sedatives.

Dependence

Tolerance and withdrawal can make stopping extremely difficult. This is a health issue that benefits from structured support rather than shame.

Treatment and safety

Specialist drug services and medical teams can offer evidence-based treatment and harm-reduction support. If someone is unresponsive or breathing abnormally, call emergency services immediately.

A gentle check-in

Ask yourself: What does this substance do for me? What happens before I use it? What happens afterwards? What has become harder because of it? What support would make change feel more possible?

Notice	Consider
Triggers, cravings, quantity, secrecy, sleep, mood and consequences.	GP support, local drug/alcohol services, counselling, trusted people and practical harm-reduction advice.

Important safety note

This resource is educational and does not replace medical assessment. Some substances can cause dangerous withdrawal or overdose. If there is unconsciousness, severe breathing difficulty, seizure, collapse, chest pain or immediate danger, seek emergency medical help.

You deserve support that looks at the whole person - not just the substance.