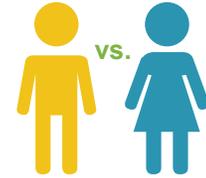


# » WOMEN AND PRESCRIPTION PAIN MEDICATIONS

» **RATES OF PRESCRIPTION PAIN MEDICATION USE AND MISUSE HAVE BEEN INCREASING AMONG WOMEN IN CANADA.**



1 in 6 Canadians use opioid pain relievers



In Canada, 64% of users of opioids are women and 36% are men

Canada has the world's second-highest prescription opioid pain reliever consumption rate, after only the United States.



» **OPIOIDS** are a type of pain reliever. These medications are prescribed mostly to treat acute and chronic pain. Prescription opioids include drugs like hydrocodone (e.g., Vicodin), oxycodone (e.g., OxyContin, Percocet), morphine and codeine.

## » WHAT DOES MISUSE LOOK LIKE?

1. Using opioids together with alcohol or other medications that have a sedating effect
2. Taking the medication at a higher-than-recommended dose
3. Changing the way the medication is taken (e.g., crushing tablets and injecting them)
4. Using medication that was prescribed for someone else (e.g. using medication of a friend or family member)

## WOMEN CAN BE MORE VULNERABLE THAN MEN TO PRESCRIPTION OPIOID MISUSE BECAUSE OF:



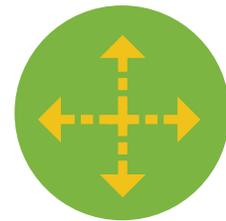
### Differing experiences with chronic pain

Women can be more sensitive than men to pain due to differences in sex hormones and genetics. They also have differences in how their bodies absorb, metabolize, and eliminate opioid medications.



### Histories of violence and trauma

Many women have past or current experiences of violence and trauma. They may not have received adequate treatment or are using opioids to self-medicate and manage symptoms of trauma.



### Different patterns of health care use

Women tend to visit health care providers more often than men, are more likely to use prescription drugs overall, and are more likely to be prescribed opioids and anti-anxiety medications than men.

## » LONG TERM USE OF PRESCRIPTION PAIN MEDICATION

Long-term use can have specific risks and effects on women.

Chronic Headaches (often called “medication overuse headaches”)

Hormonal Changes

Infertility

Anxiety and Depression



Serious harms from opioids and other prescription medications include addiction, overdose and death.

## » PRESCRIPTION PAIN MEDICATION DURING PREGNANCY



Many women are prescribed opioids before they become pregnant and pregnant women are increasingly prescribed opioid medications.

» For women who are pregnant, opioid use can increase the chance that the baby will be born prematurely or experience symptoms of withdrawal

» Women who are pregnant may need to use alternate forms of pain management

» Alternatives should always be discussed with a doctor as abruptly stopping the use of opioids in an opioid-dependent pregnant woman can result in harms such as early labor.

## » HOW CAN WE CHANGE THIS?

» Women can speak to their doctor about different treatment options and make changes to how they manage their pain.

» Women can try pain medications that are not opioids or ask for a referral to a doctor who can manage their pain better.

» Physicians can help pregnant women with symptoms of withdrawal, including the use of medications such as methadone and buprenorphine.

» All health care and social service providers can provide women with information about how common substance misuse is for women with past experiences of violence and trauma and where to seek support with healing or women-centred addiction treatment services.

» Women can try complementary therapies and non-medication options such as: massage, acupuncture, mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) and other relaxation and cognitive techniques, and yoga

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### » Sources

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