

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Find support to fit your life.

This discussion guide is for people living with opioid dependence or for those who would like to explore changing their relationship with opioids. It is designed to help you reflect on your experiences and prepare for conversations with a healthcare professional, support person or someone you trust.

What is opioid dependence?

Opioid dependence, or opioid use disorder, is defined as the chronic use of opioids that causes significant distress or impairment, either physically or mentally.¹

For some people, reducing or stopping opioid use can lead to withdrawal symptoms, which may feel similar to the flu.² Experiencing withdrawal can be a sign that your body has become physically dependent on a drug, and psychological dependence may also be present.³

No one plans to become dependent on a drug, but opioids are associated with a high risk of dependence. Like other conditions, opioid dependence has specific symptoms and a pattern of progression, where it tends to get worse over time.¹

Everyone's experience is different. Whether your goal is to reduce your opioid use, make a change, or seek support, the first step is finding an approach that fits your life.

Your relationship with opioids

The following questions are designed to help you reflect on your relationship with opioids. If you have been prescribed an opioid for pain management, consider whether your current use differs from how it was originally prescribed.

Over the past 3 months, write down what you have used and how often you have used?

Medicine name (For example, the opioid medicine prescribed to you)	Never	Once or twice only	Few times a month	Weekly	Daily or almost daily

How do you feel about your responses to these questions (please tick/select)?

I'm okay	I'm feeling fine	Neutral	I'm feeling uncomfortable	I need some help from someone
				

Your health goals

If you are thinking about making a change to your opioid use, this section can help you reflect on where you are now and what matters most to you moving forward.

Does your substance use cause you any concerns with your...

Physical, mental or emotional health? E.g. illness, injury, poor sleep, unhealthy eating, bad teeth/gums, feeling sad/worried/stressed/paranoid/shame, etc.?	What about your relationships/kinship? E.g. Loss of connection or troubles/worries with family, partners, friends, children, parenting issues etc.
Yes No	Yes No
What about your lifestyle? E.g. Work, school, money, housing, caregiving responsibilities, chores, hobbies, goals etc.	What about legal concerns? E.g. Contact with police, debts/fines, court, loss of driver's licence, parenting arrangements, child protection / youth justice involvement etc.
Yes No	Yes No

When thinking about modifying or changing your use of opioids,

Do you have any worries or concerns about what would happen if you cut back or stopped your opioid use?	Have you ever tried to reduce your use of opioids before?	Are you currently on an Opioid Treatment Program?
	Never Once or twice Monthly All the time	Yes No

If you're thinking about cutting back or modifying your use, how confident are you that you can make these changes? (Please tick)

Not confident		Neutral		Very confident	
1	2	3	4	5	

Finding the right support for you

Finding the right support can take time. It’s not uncommon to feel discouraged if things don’t fall into place straight away.

You may need to speak with different healthcare professionals, explore new support services, or find someone who understands your experiences and goals. Remember, finding the right fit is an important part of the process.

Has anyone ever expressed concern over substance use?

Who said something?	What was their concern?		Is this person a support person to you?	
	Physical	Relationship	Yes	No
	Emotional	Lifestyle		
	Legal			
	Physical	Relationship	Yes	No
	Emotional	Lifestyle		
	Legal			
	Physical	Relationship	Yes	No
	Emotional	Lifestyle		
	Legal			

Who to contact

When you’re ready, you can reach out to your own healthcare professional or use the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline to help find one.



National Alcohol & Other Drug Hotline
1800 250 015



SMART Recovery Australia
<https://smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au>



Narcotics Anonymous
www.na.org.au/multi/

SMART Recovery Australia and Narcotics Anonymous might also be valuable services to help support you when you’re looking to change your drug use.

Finding non-judgmental support is important

Stigma towards opioid dependence occurs when people have negative perceptions and make unfair judgments about those who use opioids.⁴

Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your opioid use?	Yes	No
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Do you feel confident to stand up to someone if you experience stigmatising behaviour?

Not confident		Neutral		Very confident	
1	2	3	4	5	

If you experience any behaviour that makes you feel uncomfortable, or you don't feel supported, it's okay to find another healthcare professional or reach out to peer support organisations.

Do you have a regular doctor, pharmacist or support worker? What would you want them to know about your use?	Have you ever reached out to a consumer health organisation or peer support group?	
	Yes	No

Preparing for a conversation

Before speaking with a doctor, pharmacist, support person or someone you trust, it may help to think about:

- What stood out to you most from this guide?
- What would be important for someone to understand about your situation?
- What support or changes are you hoping for?
- What questions would you like to ask about opioid dependence, treatment or support options?
- Are there any personal circumstances (e.g. work, family, housing or health) that may be important to discuss?

Example questions	Not sure how to start?
- What support options are available to me? - What treatment options could be right for me? - What can I expect if I decide to make a change? - Where can I find additional support?	- I've been thinking about my relationship with opioids and would like to talk about my options. - I'd like some support to understand what changes might be right for me.

Mapping out your next steps can also help you reach your health goals:

Firstly, I'm going to...	Then I'll speak to...	After that, I'll connect with...
What action will you take:	Who will you talk to and what would you like to ask:	What local support services are you aware of:

If you are feeling overwhelmed or have difficulty staying safe, call Lifeline for confidential one-to-one support with a trained telephone crisis supporter.

Lifeline
Call: 13 11 14. Text: 0477 13 11 14.
Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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References

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