

DISCUSSION GUIDE

FIND SUPPORT TO FIT YOUR LIFE

This discussion guide is for people who are living with opioid dependence or would like to explore changing their relationship with using opioids. It can be used as a tool when speaking with healthcare professionals or peer support workers.

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 when they stop using opioids, they experience withdrawal, which involves unpleasant flu like symptoms.² You may experience withdrawal when you quit or cut back on using. This indicates you have developed a physical dependence on a drug, and possibly a psychological dependence also.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.^{1,4}

Recovery and reducing use of drugs looks different to everyone, but the first step is finding support that fits your life.






YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OPIOIDS

The following questions are designed to explore your relationship with opioids. If you have been prescribed an opioid for managing pain, use this to map how you may be using it differently to how your doctor has prescribed.

Over the past 3 months, write down what you have used and how often you have used?⁵
(please tick/select)

Category	Never	Once or twice only	Few Times a month	Weekly	Daily or almost daily

How do you feel about your responses to these questions?⁷ (please tick/select)

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

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 13
Text: 0477 13 11 14

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

This document is not intended to replace a healthcare professional's assessment, but a tool to be used alongside any support interventions.

Your health goals

If you have made the choice to make a change with your relationship with opioids this is a significant step in your journey. Use this section to explore how you feel about your current use of opioids.

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. ⁵	What about your relationships/kinship? e.g. Loss of connection or troubles/worries with family, partners, friends, children, parenting issues etc. ⁵
YES	YES
NO	NO

What about your lifestyle? e.g. Work, school, money, housing, caregiving responsibilities, chores, hobbies, goals etc. ⁵	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. ⁵
YES	YES
NO	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? ⁵	Have you ever tried to reduce your use of opioids before? (Never, Once or twice, monthly, all the time)	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)⁵

Not confident		Neutral		Very confident
1	2	3	4	5

Finding the right support for you

It can be hard to find the right support person or professional to guide you through your options. You may feel discouraged if things don't fall into place right away. You also may need to find different people to speak to, different doctors who understand you or different supports that you haven't experienced before.

Has anyone ever expressed concern over substance use?

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

When you're ready, you may reach out to peer groups or health care professionals. These people can provide support when you're looking to change your drug use.



**National Alcohol and
Other Drug Hotline**

1800 250 015



SMART Recovery Australia

<https://smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au>



Narcotics Anonymous

<https://www.na.org.au/multi/>

Say NO to stigma

Stigma towards opioid dependence is when people have negative perceptions and make unfair judgments about those who use opioids. But you have the right to say no to stigma!

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.

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?

1	2	3	4	5
Not confident		Neutral		Very confident

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

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	What local support services are you aware of

It's also okay to not have all the answers, but speaking to someone can be one of the steps to find support that fits your life.

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References:

1. John Hopkins Medicine. (2024). Opioid Use Disorder.[online] Available at: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/opioid-use-disorder> Accessed May 2024 2. Darke, S., Larney, S., and Farrell, M. (2017) Yes, people can die from opiate withdrawal. Addiction, 112: 199–200. doi: 10.1111/add.13512. 3. Australian Drug and Alcohol Foundation. 2024. Withdrawal. Available at: <https://adf.org.au/reducing-risk/withdrawal/> Accessed May 2024. 4. Australian Drug and Alcohol Foundation. 2021. Understanding opioid harm reduction. Available at: <https://adf.org.au/insights/opioid-harm-reduction/> Accessed May 2024. 5. Queensland Health. 2024. Insight's Check Tools (2024). Available at: <https://insight.qld.edu.au/shop/opioid-check-collated-tool-2024> Accessed May 2024 6. Ghouchani, Hamid Tavakoli et al. "Developing and validating a measurement tool to self-report perceived barriers in substance use treatment: the substance use treatment barriers questionnaire (SUTBQ)." Substance abuse treatment, prevention, and policy vol. 18,1 82. 7 Nov. 2021. doi:10.1186/s13011-021-00419-1 7. Alcohol and Drug Foundation. (2019). Opioids - Alcohol and Drug Foundation. [online] Adf.org.au. Available at: <https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/opioids/> Accessed May 2024.