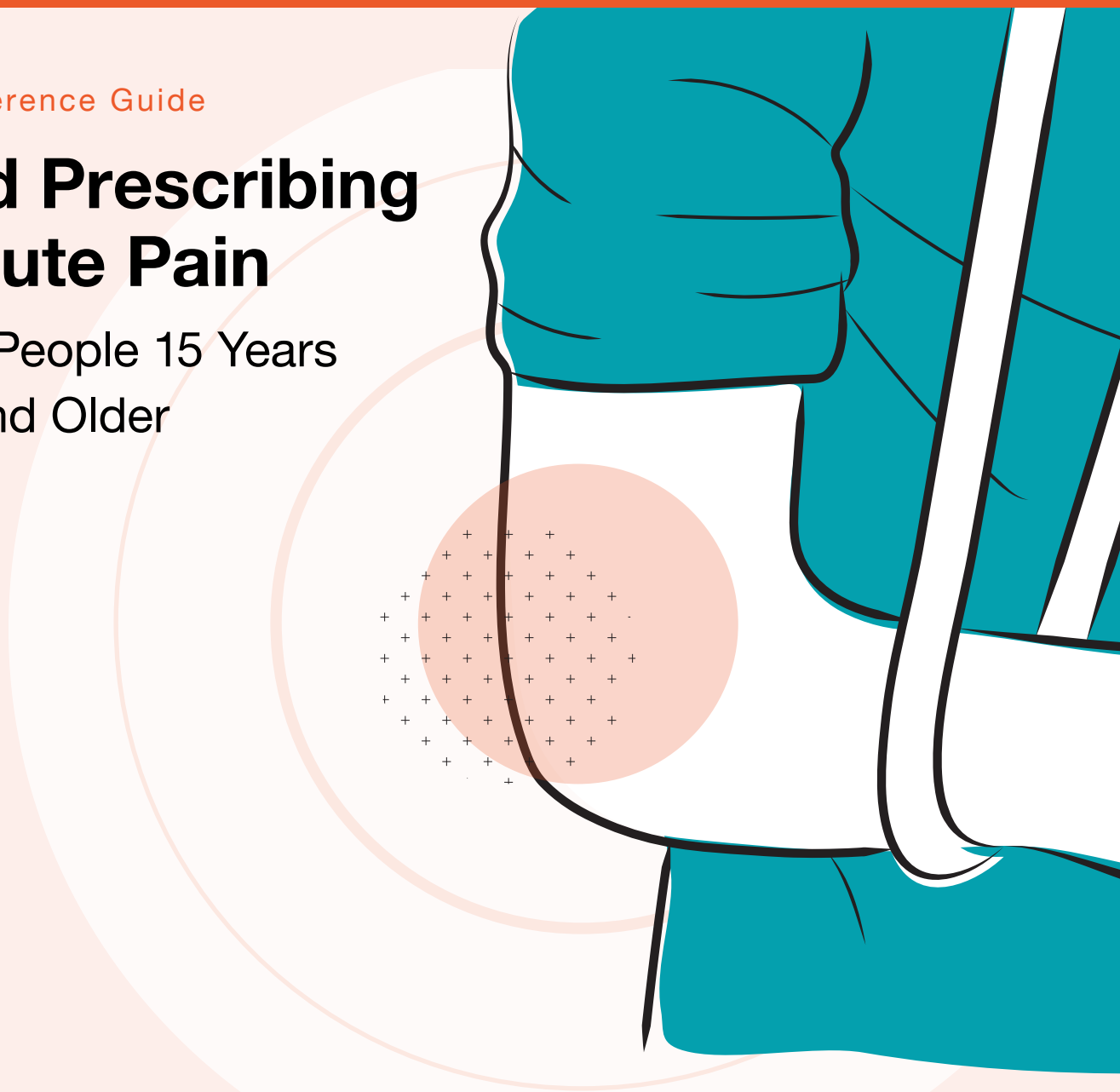
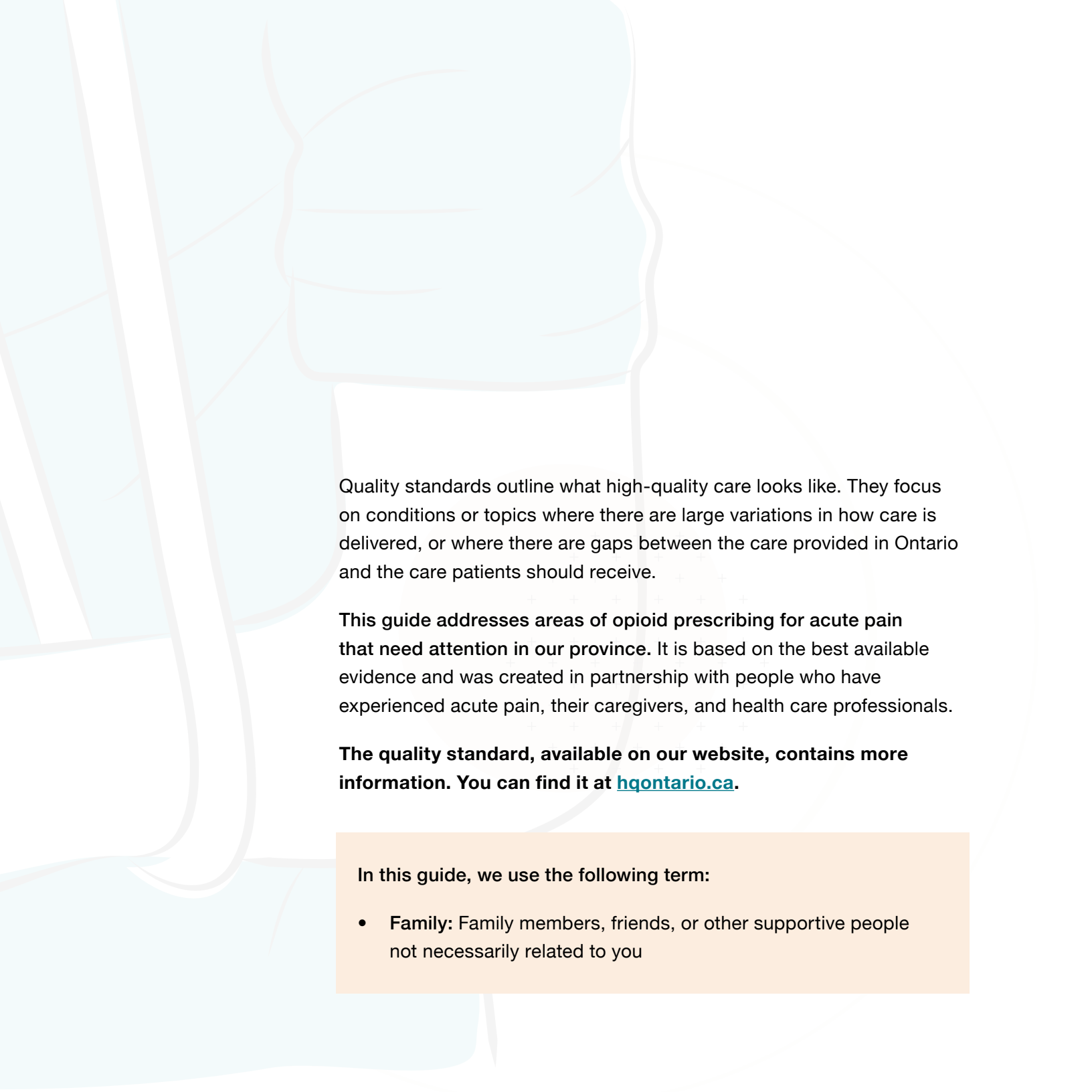


Patient Reference Guide

Opioid Prescribing for Acute Pain

Care for People 15 Years
of Age and Older





Quality standards outline what high-quality care looks like. They focus on conditions or topics where there are large variations in how care is delivered, or where there are gaps between the care provided in Ontario and the care patients should receive.

This guide addresses areas of opioid prescribing for acute pain that need attention in our province. It is based on the best available evidence and was created in partnership with people who have experienced acute pain, their caregivers, and health care professionals.

The quality standard, available on our website, contains more information. You can find it at [hqontario.ca](https://www.hqontario.ca).

In this guide, we use the following term:

- **Family:** Family members, friends, or other supportive people not necessarily related to you

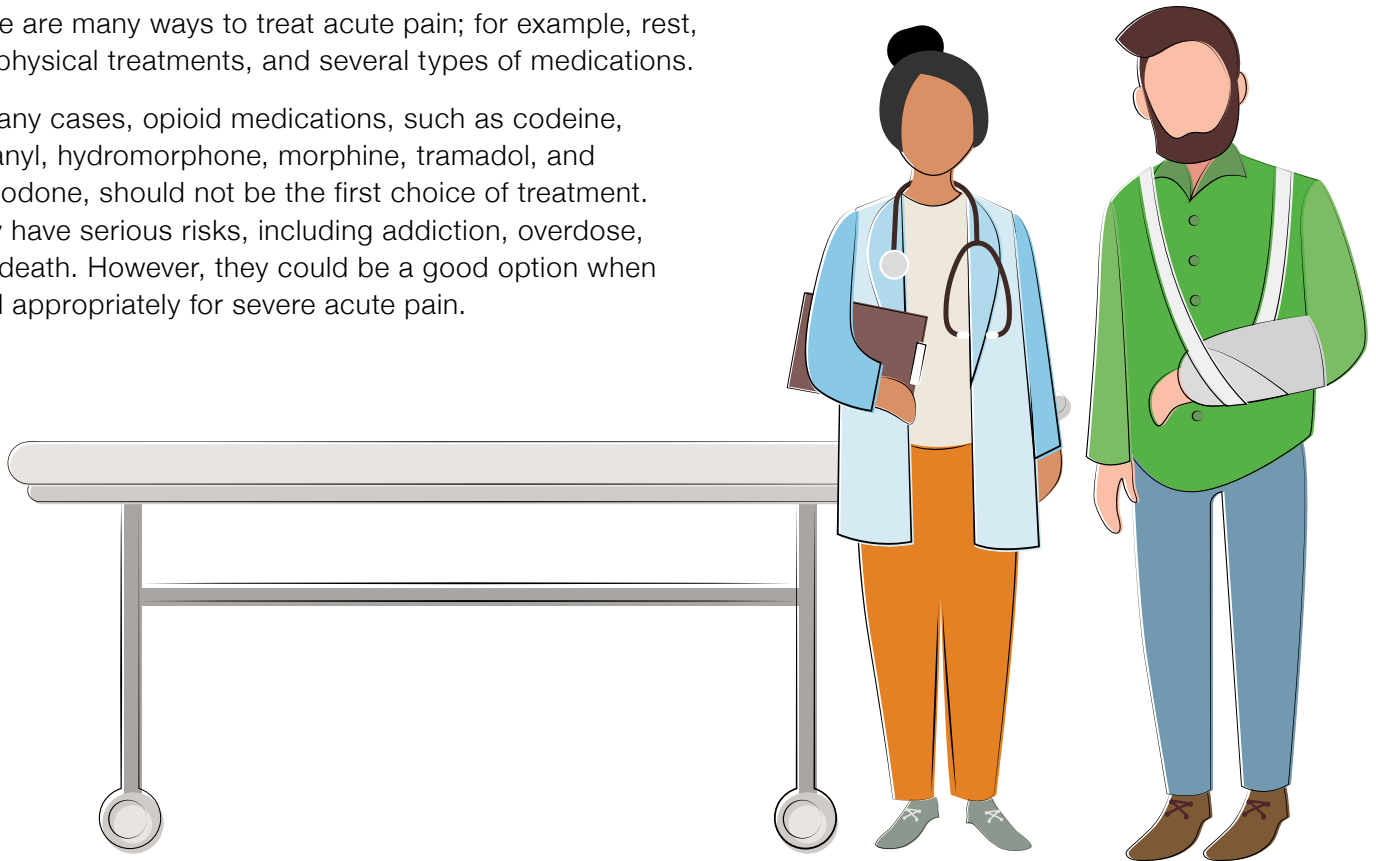
This guide is for people with acute pain and their families. It can help you know what to ask for when receiving treatment and to make sure you receive the highest-quality care.

Acute pain is a normal response to things like a cut, a broken bone, a kidney stone, or surgery. Sometimes, acute pain has no obvious cause, like with migraine headaches. Acute pain comes on fast and goes away in a few days or weeks.

Acute pain can be mild and easily tolerated. Or, it can be completely disabling, or anywhere between these two extremes.

There are many ways to treat acute pain; for example, rest, ice, physical treatments, and several types of medications.

In many cases, opioid medications, such as codeine, fentanyl, hydromorphone, morphine, tramadol, and oxycodone, should not be the first choice of treatment. They have serious risks, including addiction, overdose, and death. However, they could be a good option when used appropriately for severe acute pain.



If you or someone you care about has been prescribed or is considering opioids for acute pain...



You can use this guide to work with your health care professional to make a care plan that works for you, including access to culturally appropriate care, and that lowers your risk of being harmed by opioids. Use this guide to learn what high-quality care looks like for acute pain, to ask informed questions about opioids that may be prescribed, and to learn about other types of care that may help.

Care plans can be very different for each person, so it is important to work closely with your health care professional.

Here are some things to consider.

What to Discuss With Your Health Care Professional

Assessing Acute Pain

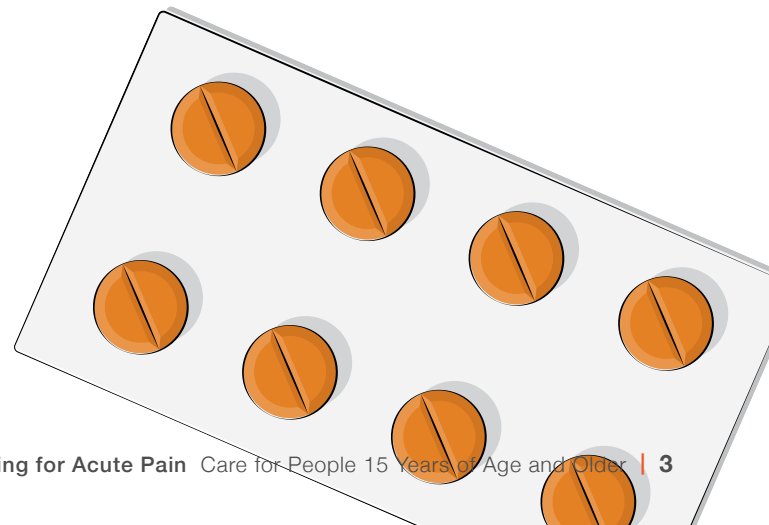
- Before prescribing opioids, your health care professional should offer you a physical examination and ask about your physical and mental health, your medical history, any other medications you are taking, and how you have responded to treatment for pain in the past.

Alternatives to Opioid Medications

- Your health care professional should offer you a variety of ways to manage your pain, including different kinds of physical treatments and medications, depending on the cause of your pain. Physical treatments include things like using braces or splints, stretching, and massage.
- You should be offered opioids only when other types of treatment are unable to manage your pain.

Starting and Stopping Opioid Medications

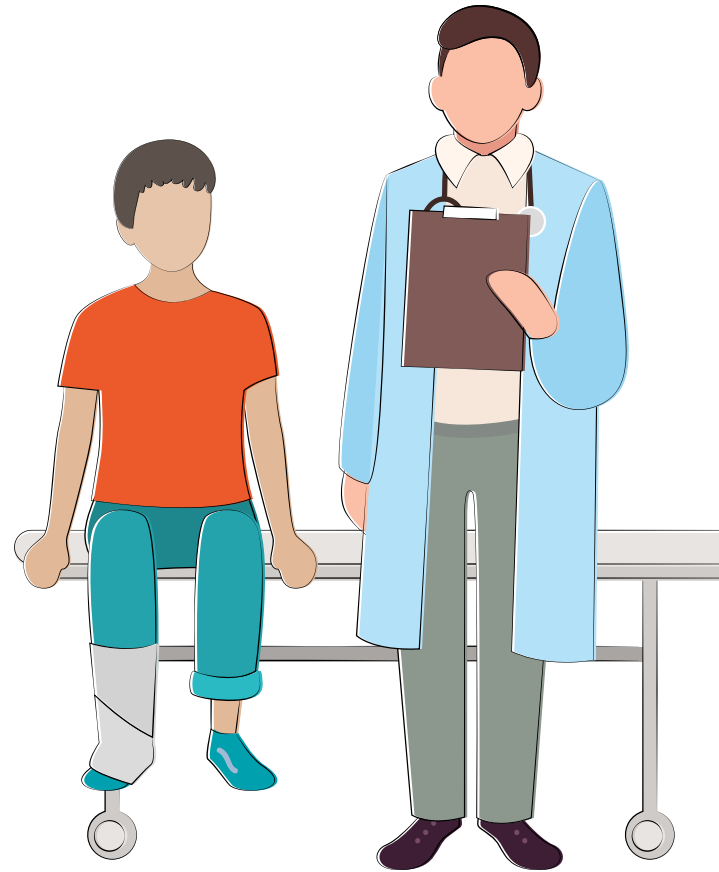
- Your health care professional should discuss the potential benefits and harms of opioid therapy for acute pain with you so that you can make informed decisions about your care together. If you have family or others involved in your care, they should also receive this information. Potential harms of opioid therapy include uncomfortable physical symptoms when you stop taking the medication, addiction, and overdose.
- To make sure you get the safest treatment, your health care professional and pharmacist should check your prescription history before prescribing or giving you opioids. They do this to see if you have recently been given opioids or other medications that are dangerous to take with opioids.
- Whenever possible, you should not take opioids and benzodiazepines at the same time. Benzodiazepines include medications like lorazepam, diazepam, and alprazolam. Taking opioids and benzodiazepines together can cause serious breathing problems.
- If you are prescribed opioids, your health care professional should prescribe the lowest dose and lowest strength that will work for you. If you are receiving care outside of a hospital setting (such as with your family doctor, nurse practitioner, or dentist), in most cases, your prescription should be for 3 days or less.
- More severe acute pain, such as pain from major surgery, may require a longer prescription but usually not more than 7 days. Your health care professional should monitor your pain and help you to stop taking opioids when your pain is reduced.
- If you take opioids for more than a few days and then cut down or stop quickly, you may experience uncomfortable physical symptoms such as trouble sleeping, muscle aches, diarrhea, upset stomach, and vomiting. If you experience any of these symptoms or have trouble stopping your medication, your health care professional will work with you to make a plan to help you cut down and stop taking opioids safely.
- When your pharmacist gives you opioids, they should explain to you how to safely store your medication and how to safely dispose of any unused medication you no longer need.



If You Are Already Taking Opioids

- If you are already taking opioids (perhaps because of chronic pain) and you are now experiencing acute pain, the health care professional providing care for your acute pain should communicate with the health care professional who has prescribed your current opioid prescription. They should work together to make changes to your regular opioid prescription or care plan, if needed, to make sure your pain is managed safely and effectively.
- If you take buprenorphine/naloxone or methadone for opioid use disorder (which includes opioid addiction), continue to take this medication during times when you are being treated for acute pain.

Having acute pain can be difficult, but many types of treatment are available, including ones that don't involve medication. Your health care professional will work with you to find the best type of treatment to help you reach your pain management goals.



Everybody is different, and some options may not apply in your situation. If you have questions about your care, it is important to speak with your health care professional.

Notes

Looking for more information?

Please contact us at qualitystandards@hqontario.ca or **1-866-623-6868** if you have any questions or feedback about this patient reference guide.

The quality standard, available on our website, contains more information. You can find it at hqontario.ca.

About Health Quality Ontario

Health Quality Ontario is the provincial advisor on the quality of health care. We are motivated by a single-minded purpose: **Better health for all Ontarians.**

Our quality standards are concise sets of statements outlining what quality care looks like for conditions or topics where there are large variations in how care is delivered, or where there are gaps between the care provided in Ontario and the care patients should receive. They are based on the best available evidence and are developed in collaboration with clinical experts from across the province and patients and caregivers with lived experience with the topic being discussed.

For more information about Health Quality Ontario and our quality standards, visit hqontario.ca.