OxyContin

OxyContin, a trade name for the narcotic oxycodone hydrochloride, is a painkiller available in the U.S. by prescription. OxyContin, manufactured since 1996 by Purdue Pharma, is a Schedule II drug and has a very high potential for abuse. It is usually prescribed for relief of moderate to severe pain resulting from injuries, bursitis, arthritis, back problems and cancer.

OxyContin is available as a 10, 20, 40 or 80-milligram tablet. The tablets vary in color and size according to dosage. The tablets are imprinted with the letters OC on one side and the number of milligrams on the opposite side. OxyContin (Oxy) tablets have a controlled-release feature and are designed to be swallowed whole, providing as many as 12 hours of relief from chronic pain.

OxyContin is extremely potent; one tablet can be the equivalent of several Percocet tablets. It is manufactured by modifying thebaine, an alkaloid found in opium. Oxy is a central nervous system depressant that works on opioid receptors either in the brain, the spinal cord, or directly in the affected tissues.

Most people who take OxyContin as prescribed do not become addicted, although they may become addicted to the drug and need to be “withdrawn” from it by a qualified physician. Abuse of Oxy usually occurs only when patients take more than is needed for pain control.

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<th>COMMON STREET NAMES FOR OXYCONTIN</th>
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<td>OCs, Ox, Oxy, Blue, Hillbilly Heroin, Kicker, Oxycotton, 40, 80 (an 80-milligram tablet)</td>
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Illicit use of OxyContin is primarily for its euphoric effects, which are similar to heroin. Oxy abusers either chew or crush the tablets to bypass the controlled release feature. Crushed tablets can be snorted or dissolved in water and injected. Individuals who take large doses of Oxy are at high risk of severe respiratory depression that can lead to death.

Long-term abuse of OxyContin can lead to developing a tolerance to the drug, and to psychological and physical addiction. Addicted individuals who cease using Oxy usually experience significant withdrawal symptoms. Withdrawal symptoms associated with OxyContin addiction include restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, cold flashes, and involuntary leg movements.

The DEA states that coroner reports involving Oxy have increased 400 percent since 1996. Most of the deaths attributed to OxyContin have been caused by the use of Oxy with other drugs, often including alcohol. Nearly one million U.S. residents aged 12 years and older have illicitly used Oxy at least once in their lifetime. About 4% of high school students used Oxy last year.

- New data from emergency rooms shows that 40 percent of the 119,000 cases in 2002 where narcotic pain medications were mentioned involved oxycodone or hydrocodone. Oxycodone and hydrocodone are marketed under numerous brand names, including OxyContin, Vicodin, and Percocet.
- Rising numbers of teenagers are turning to prescription drugs like OxyContin and Vicodin to get high. Prescription-drug misuse by teenagers now exceeds their use of Ecstasy, cocaine, crack, or LSD; about 10 percent of teens have used OxyContin in their lifetime to get high. According to a Florida medical examiners 2005 report, more people in Florida died last year from prescription drug overdoses than from illegal drugs!