



High-Risk Medicines

FACTS FOR CONSUMERS



What are high-risk medicines?

High-risk medicines are those that are most likely to cause significant harm when not taken properly. However, they have been proven to be safe and effective when taken properly. But they can cause great harm if a mistake happens while taking them. This means that it is very important for you to know about these medicines and take them exactly as prescribed by your doctor.

This document provides information on three groups of high-risk medicines: opioids, blood thinners and diabetes medicines.



Opioids

Living with pain can be hard. You and your doctor should discuss treatment options with all of the risks and benefits.

Some medicines, such as prescription opioids, can help relieve pain in the short term but also come with serious risks and possible problems. Opioids must be prescribed by your doctor and used carefully. The most common types of harm associated with these medicines include confusion, sleepiness and over sedation.

Making sure your pain is manageable makes you feel better. The purpose for managing your pain is to help you:

- Function better
- Participate in activities to help you recover
- Breathe deep to prevent other health issues such as pneumonia
- Get up and move to prevent blood clots

Some patients are at risk for harm even with proper dosing. The most common kinds of harm are:

- Physical dependence (addiction)
- Over-sedation
- Distressed breathing
- Confusion
- Sleepiness/dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Constipation
- Depression

Other non-opioid pain medicines may relieve pain as well as opioids but without the risks. Remember, your doctor and pharmacist are partners in helping you manage your pain. It's important to talk about any and all side effects and concerns to make sure you're getting the best and safest care.



Blood Thinners

Blood thinners (anticoagulants), such as heparin and warfarin, are often used to treat heart problems and blood clots. Blood thinners are used widely, but sometimes mistakes happen and not all patients are being managed the same. The most common types of harm associated with these medicines include low blood pressure and unusual bleeding.

Blood thinners can be affected by:

- Other medicines
- Herbal supplements
- Over the counter medicines
- Food



Diabetes Medicines

Diabetes medicines are used to treat diabetes. As with any medicine, side effects and risks for harm are possible. Your doctor understands the possible risks and how these medicines can react to other medicines. The most common type of harm associated with these medicines is low blood sugar.

Your body's blood sugar levels change in response to foods you eat, physical activity, stress, and many other factors. There are many types of diabetes medicines available. They work differently in each patient so getting the right type and dose is important to prevent any harm to you. The goal of diabetes medicines is to help you control your blood sugar so you don't have too much or too little in your bloodstream.

It is important for you to work with your healthcare provider to find the medicine and dose that is right for you.

You can find more information about many of the high-risk medicines. Consumer leaflets are available that offer important safety tips for taking these medicines.

Leaflets are available for the following medicines:

Blood Thinners

- Warfarin
- Lovenox (enoxaparin)

Opioids

- Fentanyl patches
- Hydrocodone with acetaminophen
- Oxycodone with acetaminophen

Diabetes Medicines

- Humalog (insulin lispro)
- NovoLog (insulin aspart)
- Lantus (insulin glargine)
- Apidra (insulin glulisine)
- Levemir (insulin detemir)



This is a sample of the leaflets that are available on our website.

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