

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. 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 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.

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
- Improve sleep
- Enhance overall quality of life

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

- Physical dependence or addiction
- Oversedation
- Distressed breathing
- Confusion
- Sleepiness/dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Constipation
- Depression

Other non-opioid pain medicines may relieve pain as well as opioids, but with fewer risks. Remember, your doctor and pharmacist are partners in helping you manage your pain. It's important to talk about all side effects and concerns to make sure you're getting the best and safest care.

Blood Thinners

Blood thinners (anticoagulants), such as Eliquis, Xarelto, and Coumadin, are often used to treat heart problems and blood clots. Blood thinners are used widely, but sometimes bleeding happens for various reasons, and many may not be preventable. The most common types of harm associated with these medicines include unusual bleeding.

Blood thinners can be affected by:

- Other medicines
- Vitamins
- Herbal supplements
- Over the counter medicines
- Food
- Alcohol
- Infection

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 out 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 (but not limited to):

Blood Thinners

- Coumadin
- Eliquis
- Xarelto
- Pradaxa



Opioids

- Duragesic
- Vicodin
- Percocet
- Methadone

Diabetes Medicines

- Humalog
- Lantus
- Levemir
- NovoLog



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