

# Naloxone-induced Precipitated Opioid Withdrawal

## What is naloxone-induced precipitated opioid withdrawal?

Precipitated withdrawal means that a person encounters a medication that blocks the effects of a substance they are physically dependent on. Naloxone-induced precipitated opioid withdrawal happens when people with a physical dependence on opioids are given more naloxone than needed to reverse an opioid poisoning.

Naloxone quickly blocks the effects of the opioids in the person's body, which can cause sudden and uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms. People who experience naloxone-induced precipitated opioid withdrawal may decline follow-up care, lose trust in health care providers, or return to opioid use, which may increase their risk of future overdose.

## Ways to minimize naloxone-induced precipitated opioid withdrawal

Whenever possible, start with a lower dose for people with physical opioid dependence to avoid inducing precipitated opioid withdrawal. Use injectable naloxone to give the lowest effective dose to restore breathing. Nasal naloxone gives a higher dose, which can increase the chance of precipitated opioid withdrawal and may cause more complications for pregnant people with a physical opioid tolerance.

The goal of naloxone is to reverse respiratory depression. **Do not give naloxone solely to reverse sedation.** Gradually increase the amount of naloxone to avoid precipitated opioid withdrawal in people with a physical opioid dependence and **continue providing rescue breaths until breathing returns to normal.**

## Signs & symptoms of naloxone-induced precipitated opioid withdrawal

- Fast heart rate (tachycardia) • Tremors • Sweating or chills • Nausea or vomiting
- Abdominal cramps • Muscle or joint pain • Anxiety or irritability • Dilated pupils

## If someone is experiencing naloxone-induced precipitated opioid withdrawal

Let them know that withdrawal symptoms will get better when naloxone wears off within 30 minutes to 2 hours. Encourage them to go to the hospital for help with their symptoms. The hospital has medications that can help relieve symptoms without the risk of rebound opioid poisoning.

If the person is pregnant, advise them that precipitated opioid withdrawal can cause pregnancy complications. Encourage them to go to hospital.

Advise the person that using opioids before naloxone wears off:

- Will not help with withdrawal symptoms,
- Will not give them the usual effects and pain relief of opioids, and
- Can cause opioid poisoning symptoms to come back when the naloxone wears off.