

NATIONAL CENTER ON ELDER ABUSE

Minimizing the Risk of Opioid-Related Elder Abuse



Experts believe that the incidence of elder mistreatment has grown with the rising opioid epidemic.¹ Older people commonly experience chronic health conditions and associated pain for which opioids are prescribed. Mounting reports of opioid misuse have been documented among elders addicted to drugs and their adult children who steal their medication. Though there is little data to quantify the breadth of the problem, reported incidents of opioid misuse often result in financial exploitation and may be accompanied by other, co-occurring forms of mistreatment such as emotional abuse and physical harm. Despite the complexity of this issue, opioid-related elder abuse is an injustice that we can address and prevent.

Signs of Opioid-Related Elder Abuse

- > Circular answers to questions about use of opioids
- > Dehydration or unusual weight loss
- > Displaying unusual changes in behavior and sleep
- > Increased fear or anxiety, especially when asked about opioid use
- > Isolation from friends or family
- > Missing medications (lost or stolen)
- > Seeking medication refills before the scheduled refill date
- > Unattended medical needs or unsanitary living conditions
- > Unexplained injuries, bruises, cuts, or sores
- > Unexplained disappearance of funds or valuable possessions

¹Roberto, K. A., Teaster, P. B., Lindberg, B. W., & Blancato, R. (2020). A first (and disturbing) look at the relationship between the opioid epidemic and elder abuse: Insights of human service professionals. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 0733464820947279.

At Your Next Doctor's Visit...

- Have your medication list ready and be prepared to discuss the specifics of current medications.
- Have alone time with your medical provider.
- Figure out a realistic goal for pain management.
- Actively ask questions:
 - Are there any ways to cut back the number of medications?
 - Are there any alternative strategies to pain management?

Tips to Reduce Risk of Opioid-Related Elder Abuse

- Maintain social engagement with a group of people.
- Store medications in a secure and safe place and out of sight of anyone who might misuse them—either by accident or by theft.
- Have a multi-modal pain management plan (occupational therapy, physical therapy, etc.).
- Talk with a professional you trust to connect with support services, make a report, or access more information.

Reach out for help, report abuse!

Report suspected abuse in the community to **Adult Protective Services** and suspected abuse in long-term care facilities to the **Long-Term Care Ombudsman**. In the event of emergency, call **911**.

To connect to a local or state reporting number, contact the Eldercare Locator at eldercare.acl.gov or at **1-800-677-1116**.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [National Center on Elder Abuse](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \[SAMHSA\]](#)
National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP [4357]
- What I Should Know About Opioid Pain Medicine: Fact Sheet
[English](#) | [Spanish](#)

