



Chronic pain is tough to treat. The opioids are one class of medicines sometimes used to relieve moderate to severe pain. Morphine, OxyContin, Demerol, and Vicodin are examples of opioids. All the opioids can cause serious problems when abused or inappropriately prescribed. And they should never be taken without careful monitoring by a doctor.

To help you and your doctor evaluate whether you need an opioid, and if so, which one may be best, *Consumer Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, and cost. This 2-page brief is a summary of a 23-page report you can access on the Internet at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org. You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this free Web site. Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. Grants from the Engelberg Foundation and the National Library of Medicine help fund *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*.

DO YOU NEED AN OPIOID?

Most people with chronic pain don't need an opioid. But if your pain is unremitting, not well controlled by non-opioid pain relievers such as acetaminophen or an NSAID (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug), your doctor may consider trying an opioid. Most doctors will try other painkillers first. For example, if you have migraines, a drug called a triptan may be better than an opioid. Likewise, people who have pain caused by nerve disease or damage should first try one of the drugs in a class called anticonvulsants.

Our Recommendations

Opioids are highly effective and usually the drugs of choice in relieving acute severe pain, such as from a bad injury or after surgery. But they are only moderately effective in treating long-term chronic pain, and their effectiveness can diminish over time.

Indeed, the long-term use of opioids, though not well studied, has been linked to: (a) a decrease in sex hormones leading to both a loss of interest in sex and impaired sexual function; (b) a decline in immune function; and (c) an increase the body's sensitivity to pain. Opioids also can be addictive and are prone to be abused and misused.

But if other measures fail, your doctor may consider an opioid. Taking effectiveness, safety and side effects, dosing flexibility and convenience, and cost into account, we have chosen the following opioids as *Best Buys*:

- *Generic codeine with acetaminophen*
- *Generic morphine extended release*
- *Generic oxycodone extended release*
- *Generic oxycodone with acetaminophen*

These four medicines provide good value, with most lower-dose regimens costing less than \$175 a month. Higher doses and some extended release formulations of these medicines are more expensive.

There is no reason to take the brand-name versions of our *Best Buys*, or any opioid for that matter. That includes well-known brands such as OxyContin, Percocet, and Vicodin.

This information was last updated in April 2008.

Selected Types of Chronic Pain and Drugs to Treat It*

Condition	First Try	Are Opioids Useful?
Headaches	Acetaminophen or an NSAID**	Very rarely
Migraines	Acetaminophen, NSAIDs, Excedrin, Triptans	Rarely
Pain due to moderate or severe trauma (wounds, burns, fractures, etc.)	Strong doses of acetaminophen or NSAIDs	Yes, often used
Post-surgical pain	Acetaminophen, NSAIDs	Opioids needed and commonly used if pain is moderate to severe
Muscle aches and pulls	Acetaminophen, NSAIDs	Rarely
Osteoarthritis	Acetaminophen, NSAIDs	Rarely
Chronic back pain	Acetaminophen, NSAIDs	Opioids may be necessary if other drugs do not control pain and pain is persistent.

*The information in this table is meant as general guidance and reflects typical or common medical practice.

**Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug. Includes aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen.

Selected Opioids – Dosing and Costs*

Generic Name and Strength	Brand Name(s) ¹	Frequency of Use Per Day ²	Total Daily Dose ³	Average Monthly Cost ⁴
Codeine plus acetaminophen – pills				
Codeine 60mg plus acetaminophen 300mg	Tylenol No. 4	6	360mg	\$235
Codeine 60mg plus acetaminophen 300mg	APAP with codeine	6	360mg	\$38
Fentanyl patches				
Fentanyl extended release 25mcg/hour	Duragesic	One every 72 hours	600mcg	\$240
Fentanyl extended release 25mcg/hour	Generic	One every 72 hours	600 mcg	\$143
Hydrocodone plus acetaminophen – pills				
Hydrocodone 10mg plus acetaminophen 660mg	Vicodan HP	4	40 mg	\$196
Hydrocodone 10 mg plus acetaminophen 660 mg	Generic	4	40 mg	\$79
Hydromorphone – pills				
Hydromorphone 8mg	Dilaudid	4	32mg	\$228
Hydromorphone 8mg	Generic	4	32mg	\$78
Levorphanol – pills				
Levorphanol 2mg	Generic	4	8mg	\$136
Levorphanol 2mg	Generic	6	12mg	\$204
Meperidine – pills				
Meperidine 50mg	Demerol	6	300mg	\$290
Meperidine 50mg	Meperitab	6	300 mg	\$144
Meperidine 50mg	Generic	6	300 mg	\$164
Methadone – pills				
Methadone 10mg	Methadose, Dolophine, or Generic	4	40mg	\$28-\$38
Morphine – pills				
Morphine extended release 30mg	Kadian	1-3	30-90mg	\$130-\$266
Morphine extended release 30mg	Generic	1-3	30-90mg	\$43-\$129
Oxycodone – pills				
Oxycodone extended release 20mg	Oxycontin	2	40mg	\$227
Oxycodone extended release 20mg	Generic	2	40mg	\$157-\$175
Oxycodone 7.5mg plus acetaminophen 500mg	Percocet	4	30mg	\$442
Oxycodone 7.5mg plus acetaminophen 500mg	Generic	4	30mg	\$139
Oxymorphone – pills				
Oxymorphone extended release 10mg	Opana ER	2	20mg	\$245
Oxymorphone extended release 20mg	Opana ER	2	40mg	\$434
Propoxyphene – pills				
Propoxyphene 65mg	Darvon	4	260mg	\$133
Propoxyphene 65mg	Generic	4	260mg	\$51
Tramadol – pills				
Tramadol extended release 100 mg	Ultram ER	1	100mg	\$128
Tramadol extended release 200 mg	Ultram ER	1	200 mg	\$209

*Selected opioids and doses. For a more complete listing, see our full report at www.CRBESTBUYDRUGS.org.

1. "Generic" indicates it's the generic version of this drug. 2. As typically and generally prescribed. Means number of pills unless otherwise noted. 3. Total daily dose of opioid only. 4. Prices reflect nationwide retail average for August 2007, rounded to the nearest dollar. They are derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Health Source Audit Suite.® Wolters Kluwer Health is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.

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