

ran out early? or going cold turkey?

you are a person living with chronic pain,
and have run out of medication, or otherwise expect to "go cold turkey" off your medication.

your narcotics contract says,
"I understand that I can NOT get replacement narcotics if I run out early,
if they are lost or stolen, if they get wet or are destroyed, etc."

this handout tells you **what to expect** and **how to deal** with this situation.

what to expect:

when you stop taking chronic narcotic medicine, or reduce your dosage, you "get sick" (have withdrawal symptoms).
WITHDRAWAL IS NOT MEDICALLY DANGEROUS. it makes you feel bad, but it is not medically dangerous.

- it does not strain your heart.
- it does not cause convulsions or seizures.
- it does not cause hallucinations or make you lose control of your behavior.

withdrawal is like a bad case of the flu, and lasts about as long as a bad case of the flu.

symptoms start 24-72 hours after last dose, and continue for 5-20 days, depending on type/strength of medicine.

what to do:

*if you have **any** medicine left, follow this checklist:*

- count how many days until you can fill your next prescription.
- count how many scheduled and breakthrough meds you have available.
- evenly divide pills between days to find how many pills you could take per day.
- write a plan for what time of day each day you will take these medications.
take into account which time of day is worst for your chronic pain (first thing in the morning? bedtime?).
alternatively, write a plan to gradually taper down, with fewer pills each day. it's important to have this plan written down, so you don't make a mistake when not feeling well.
- also make a plan for how you can "fill in" between doses, with tylenol and ibuprofen as needed, at the dosages i recommend (see bottom of page).
IMPORTANT: if you will be taking any "combo" narcotic medicines that contain tylenol ("APAP" - examples: vicodin, percocet), ask me for help to figure out how much extra tylenol you can take.
- if you are a cardholder in the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program, arrange enough medicine to help with pain control (it may help with withdrawal symptoms, too)
- finally, make a plan to reduce your obligations and limit your activities as needed to get through the coming days/weeks; keep up with good nutrition and vitamins, too
- consider starting to see an acupuncturist or massage therapist at this time, to further help you with pain management. for many people, the cost of acupuncture is about the same as the cost of narcotic pain medicine.
- prepare yourself and your family for temporary withdrawal (see next page).

how to use tylenol and ibuprofen for pain

- if you have normal liver function and NO bleeding stomach ulcers, you can take 2 extra-strength tylenol AND 3 regular-strength ibuprofen, up to 4 times per day. (total: 4000mg tylenol + 2400mg ibuprofen, per 24 hours)
- if you have liver disease, but NO stomach ulcers, take ibuprofen ONLY, 3 regular-strength, up to 4 times per day. (total: 2400mg ibuprofen per 24 hours)
- if you have bleeding stomach ulcers, but NO liver disease, take tylenol ONLY, 2 extra-strength, up to 4 times per day. (total: 4000mg tylenol per 24 hours)

while you take ibuprofen, DO NOT take aspirin, exedrine, aleve, naproxen, naprosyn, or alka-seltzer.

while you take tylenol, DO NOT take other medicines containing tylenol. examples: allerest, nyquil, dayquil.

DO buy cheapest generic tylenol (called acetaminophen, "a-SEE-ta-MIN-no-fen") and ibuprofen - **not** brand names.

IMPORTANT WARNING:

when you run out early for any reason, you can not buy or borrow narcotic pain medicine of any kind, from anyone else, for any reason, including from your friends or relatives. **this is against the law.**
you also can not seek narcotic medicine from the emergency room, a dentist, or another doctor.

shopping list for 1 week of withdrawal

i recommend a visit to a large discount store to get these items. use them as directed here:

pharmacy:

- loperimide** (brand name Imodium), for nausea, diarrhea, abdominal cramps. follow directions on the box.
- diphenhydramine** (brand name Benadryl), for sweating, shaking, anxiety attacks, sleeplessness. follow directions on the box.
- L-tyrosine**, 500mg + **vitamin B6**, 10mg, for exhaustion and loss of appetite. start using on day 3. dosage: start with 4 pills taken together every morning; adjust less or more as needed.
- multivitamin with minerals** - must contain calcium, magnesium, zinc. get the cheapest you can. gummies/chewables are fine. take daily to support health and recovery.
- tylenol** and **ibuprofen**, for muscle aches and chronic pain. see previous page for dosages.
- epsom salts**, to treat muscle aches with hot baths (optional).

grocery store:

- tissues**, jumbo box, for watering eyes, stuffy nose
- 2 bunches bananas + 1 gallon of pure orange juice**, provides potassium for restless legs/muscles. dosage: 2 bananas + 2 cups orange juice per day.
- bottled water**, 24-pack (16.9 oz/500 mL each): drink 4 a day to stay hydrated (refillable)
- 2 lb rice + 1 pair cotton socks** - to make hot packs for muscle aches and joint pain. directions: fill cotton socks halfway full with dry rice, tie closed with string or yarn (NOT wire); heat in microwave approx 2 minutes (or in 300 degree oven approx 15 minutes), then carefully apply to aching muscles/joints.
- instant foods**: 1 week's worth of soup, instant noodles, frozen dinners, nutrition drinks, etc.

other:

- video or DVD rentals**, comedies and cartoons, for distraction and depression
- hot baths**, as many as possible, for muscle aches (with or without epsom salts).
- sleep**, as much as possible, for all symptoms
- herbal medicines**: scullcap tincture for sleep, st. johnswort for depression, valerian root for anxiety
- 12-step meetings**: NA (or AA) meetings provide anonymous, free, emotional support.
 - you do not have to consider yourself an "addict."
 - you do not have to promise to become "clean and sober."
 - *you can just go to the meetings to get support.*

find local meetings at www.na.org or call 541-729-0080.

price:

\$50-100 for ALL items! HOWEVER:

- many of these you may already have at home.
- others you might have bought anyway while grocery shopping.
- only a few are special withdrawal-related purchases.

for more reading: *copy and paste, or type into your browser:*

how to endure acute withdrawal:

[www.wikihow.com/Endure-Acute-Withdrawal-from-Opiates-\(Narcotics\)](http://www.wikihow.com/Endure-Acute-Withdrawal-from-Opiates-(Narcotics))

how to detox at home:

www.wikihow.com/Detox-at-Home-from-Narcotic-Pain-Medication

acupuncture and withdrawal:

www.acupuncturehealingarts.com/addiction.html

pain management tools (click on the blue links for information):

www.theacpa.org/9/PainManagementTools.aspx

laws on controlled substances:

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Controlled_Substances_Act

"12 steps" introduction (narcotics anonymous):

www.bit.ly/cUZAtn