

What is Naloxone (Narcan™)?

Naloxone (Narcan™) is an opiate antidote. Opioids include heroin and prescription pain pills like OxyContin, Percocet, Methadone, and Vicodin. When a person is overdosing from an opioid, their central nervous system is depressed and breathing slows or stops. Naloxone blocks the effects of opioids and reverses the effects of an overdose. It cannot be used to get a person high. If given to one who has not taken opioids, it will not have any affect them, since there is no opioids in their system to reverse.

How does Naloxone work?

Opioids such as OxyContin and heroin act by binding to one's opiate receptors in the brain and cause them to activate. Naloxone knocks the opioid off of the brain's receptors and stops them from firing. Naloxone can help even if opioids are taken with alcohol or other drugs. After Naloxone is given, the person's breathing should begin to return to normal. It is very important to give help to an overdosing person right away, time is of the essence. Brain damage due to lack of oxygen can occur within only a few minutes of an opioid overdose. Naloxone gives concerned helpers a window of opportunity to prevent organ damage, brain hypoxia, or death.

What does an opioid overdose look like?

A person experiencing an opioid overdose will be unresponsive to a sternal rub, can't be awakened, can't talk, may have pinpoint pupils, blue-ish lips or fingertips, vomiting, gurgling or choking noises, or have slow breath or heartbeat.

How is Naloxone given to an overdosing person?

Naloxone can be given intravenously (IV), intramuscularly (IM) [injection into the muscle of the arm, thigh or buttocks] or intranasal (IN) [sprayed up the nose]. IN delivery eliminates the risk of needle stick injury and potential infectious disease exposure from IV or IM. Studies have found that IN delivery is equally effective to IM delivery.

How long does Naloxone take to work?

Naloxone generally works within about 5 minutes. Repeated doses may be necessary if a person is still showing signs of overdose.

Can Naloxone harm a person?

In the rare situation that one is sensitive to Naloxone, they may experience a rash or other allergic reactions. However, for the vast majority of people, Naloxone only affects people using opioids. If a person is not having an overdose but has been using opioids, Naloxone may put them into immediate withdrawals. This can be uncomfortable for the person, but it is not life threatening. In the past, EMS protocols called for an initial dose of up to 5 times as powerful as that given in current Opioid Rescue kits. This increased the likelihood of immediate withdrawal symptoms when the person went from unconscious and near death to stone-cold sober in a matter of seconds. Opioid Rescue kits are designed to gradually revive a person by restoring breathing until medical personnel can revive and takeover.



About Overdose Lifeline, Inc.

Overdose Lifeline, Inc. is a non-profit working on behalf of individuals with the disease of addiction and their families to assure adequate resources and support exist.

The mission of Overdose Lifeline is to carry the message of HOPE to individuals, families, and communities affected by addiction. We envision a time when addiction does not carry a stigma in society but instead is provided the attention and care required of a chronic disease. To realize that vision, Overdose Lifeline is working on behalf of addicts and their families to assure adequate resources and support exists.

Visit overdose-lifeline.org to learn about our programs and initiatives and how you can become involved in helping others.