

Myth: Morphine and other opioids make people die sooner.

- **Fact:** Relieving pain can improve a person's quality of life. Morphine and other opioids do not speed up the dying process. In fact, research suggests that opioids used to treat pain or shortness of breath near the end of life can help a person live longer and more comfortably.

Myth: Opioids work for all types of pain.

- **Fact:** Pain caused by bone or nerve injury may need the help of additional medications along with opioids to provide better relief for these types of pain.

Myth: Taking opioids leads to addiction.

- **Fact:** Addiction happens when people abuse opioid medicines, or do not use them as directed. Using opioids exactly as prescribed by the hospice team is safe and minimizes the risk of addiction.

Myth: Opioids are only used for the most severe pain and at the very end of life.

- **Fact:** Opioids can be used for moderate to severe pain. They are also sometimes used to help someone breathe easier. Pain relief can improve a person's mood, energy and appetite, and helps reduce the burden and stress on family, friends, and caregivers. For this reason, opioids may become part of hospice care weeks to months before the end of life.

Myth: Morphine and other opioids make a person stop breathing.

- **Fact:** Morphine and other opioids can slow and normalize the rate of breathing, which can make breathing easier, but does not stop breathing.

Myth: People who take morphine or other opioids stay sleepy and confused.

- **Fact:** While morphine and other opioids can initially cause drowsiness, that is usually temporary as the body gets used to it. Your hospice team will work with you to provide a dose that makes you or your loved one comfortable and as alert as possible.

Be sure to speak with your hospice team to discuss any questions or concerns you have about opioids.

References:

- Facts about morphine and other opioid medicines in palliative care. Palliative Care. <https://palliativecare.org.au/resource/facts-about-morphine-and-other-opioid-medicines-in-palliative-care>. Accessed April 23, 2019.
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- Swegle JM, Logemann C. Management of common opioid-induced adverse effects. Am Fam Physician. 2006 Oct 15;74(8):1347
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