



# TOLERANCE AFTER ABSTINENCE

FOR PATIENTS

## What is Tolerance?

When an opioid drug is used on a regular basis, the brain adjusts so the effects of the same amount of the drug become less over time.

A person developing tolerance to opioid drugs may:

- Need larger amounts of the drug to get the same effect or “high”
- Experience reduced effects when taking the same amount of a drug



## Can Tolerance Be Lost?

A person may lose their tolerance to an opioid if:

- The drug is not taken for a period of time, such as during rehab, being in jail or prison, or a period of sobriety in recovery.
- They stop or takes a break from using a drug.
- They reduce the amount of drugs they use, even if only for a short time.
- They change the type of drug they are using.
- They change how they take their drugs.
- They use drugs that are not as strong as they are used to, even if only for a short time.

Changes in the drug supply can also affect tolerance, including:

- Shortages or inconsistent access to drugs.
- Unpredictable changes in drug quality, purity and strength.

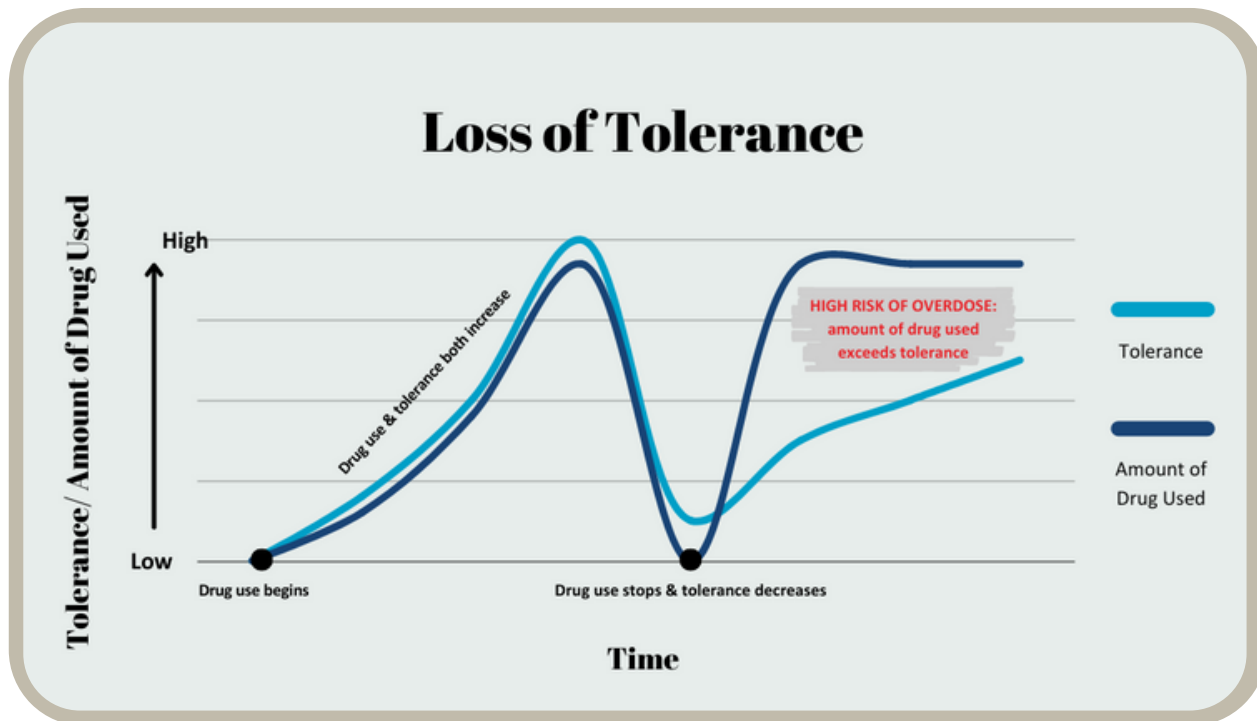
*Because of this loss of tolerance, people who use opioids are at a higher risk of opioid overdose and death if they later return to using the same amount. Caution must be taken during these vulnerable periods of time. Being on Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) can minimize a person's risk of relapse, overdose and death.*

## Overdose Prevention Strategies

Always take steps to protect yourself from overdose, especially if your tolerance is lower:

- Have naloxone (Narcan) and leave it somewhere visible.
- Don't use alone.
- Keep doors unlocked or open if possible, never use behind a locked door.
- Test a small amount first.
- Create an overdose safety plan with someone who knows you are going to use.
- Try to use with someone else and take turns using
- If it is not possible to use with someone, consider calling the “Never Use Alone” hotline at 800-484-3731.
- When possible, buy from people you trust and ask about the drug quality.
- Use fentanyl test strips to check for the presence of fentanyl before preparing your dose.
- Avoid mixing drugs, including alcohol. If possible, use only one drug at a time.
- Try to be open with your provider about drug use and relapse.





### Some Things to Think About:

- Have I been using less frequently?
- Have I been taking smaller doses?
- Have there been times when I stopped or took a break from using?
- Has the quality of the drugs I use changed?
- Have I changed what drugs I use?
- Have I changed how I take the drugs I use?

*If you answered yes to any of the above questions, your tolerance may be affected.*



### Buprenorphine as Overdose Prevention:

Many illegal drugs (not only heroin) are contaminated with fentanyl. Fentanyl and similar drugs account for 70% of opioid overdose deaths. One way to save lives is essentially to get everyone who has Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) treated before future synthesized drugs are able to overcome current therapies.



### References

- 1) <https://pcssnow.org/resource/opioid-tolerance/>
- 2) Mattick et al Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2014

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