

Opioids (narcotics)

Your treating physician (or authorized prescriber) and claim owner will work with you to help you achieve the best possible recovery following your workplace injury.

Opioids (also known as narcotics) are a group of medications that are commonly used to treat pain. This includes, but is not limited to, brand names like:

- Percocet®
- OxyNEO®
- Tylenol® #3
- Tylenol® #4
- Tramacet®

Medical evidence tells us that opioids can be beneficial in the initial two weeks following an injury or surgery. As healing occurs, opioid use should discontinue within two to four weeks. Long-term use can be harmful to you. In addition to deaths, dependence and abuse, multiple side effects are associated with chronic opioid use.

If your treating physician (or authorized prescriber) prescribes opioids, their goal is to:

- help improve your function (activity level).
- decrease your pain.
- support a safe and timely return to work.
- prevent overall harm to you.

Opioid coverage is limited by policy

WCB-Alberta [Policy 04-06](#) states that your claim owner can authorize payment of opioids for up to two weeks following an injury or surgery.

This aligns with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta standard of practice outlined in “Prescribing: Drugs Associated with Substance Use Disorders or Substance-Related Harm” and the guidelines they endorse.

In most cases, opioid treatment is not required for acute or post-operative pain beyond two weeks. However, in exceptional circumstances and if medically required, WCB may approve payment for opioid medication beyond two weeks.

Payment for opioid medication beyond two weeks

In most cases, opioid treatment is not required for acute or post-operative pain beyond two weeks. However, in exceptional circumstances and if medically required, WCB may approve an additional two-week extension (for a total of four weeks) when the authorized prescriber anticipates you will require opioid treatment:

- for up to an additional two weeks. The reason for this extension should be submitted, as well as the treatment goal and plan to reduce opioids. WCB may approve payment for a maximum of four weeks in total.
- beyond four weeks to allow the authorized prescriber to confirm your need for long-term opioid therapy and to work with you to complete your treatment agreement.

Do you want to reduce or eliminate the amount of opioids you are currently taking?

Call your claim owner. Talk to your doctor. We can help.

Payment for opioid medication beyond four weeks (long-term opioid therapy)

Let your claim owner know if both you and your physician/authorized prescriber feel you will require prescribed opioids beyond four weeks. Should this be the case, your claim owner will send you a package of information and forms that must be completed in partnership with your physician.

You must take the package to your physician, who will discuss it with you.

Completed forms must be returned to WCB-Alberta. Once they are on your claim file, your claim owner will review them along with the criteria outlined in [Policy 04-06](#) to decide if we can continue to reimburse you for your opioid medication.

In order to approve payment of opioid medication beyond four weeks, your claim owner must:

- Have a signed treatment agreement between you and your physician on file.
- Confirm you are meeting the criteria outlined in Policy 04-06, which are:
 - The prescribed opioid medication is part of an integrated, multi-disciplinary treatment plan for pain management.
 - Only one authorized prescriber is prescribing the opioid medication (generally the treating physician).
 - There is evidence to support that the benefit of continued opioid therapy outweighs the risk and that the medication is helping to improve your function, decrease your pain and progress you towards a safe return to work.
- Receive regular reporting from your physician/authorized prescriber. They must complete a report each time they see you. These reports provide an update on your progress so that we can ensure you are getting the support you need to recover, increase your activity (including potentially returning to work) and decrease your pain.

Your opioid medication receipts

We will reimburse you as long as payment for your opioid medication is approved. You will need to send in your original prescription receipts for authorized reimbursement or make arrangements with your pharmacy to bill WCB-Alberta directly.

If you would like your pharmacy to bill us directly, be sure to provide your pharmacist with your claim number and ask them to call WCB-Alberta for pre-authorization.

Your claim owner will work with you and can answer any question you may have about WCB payment for your opioid medication.

Additional resources

- [WCB Policy 04-06, Part II, Application 4](#)
- [WCB Policy 04-06, Part II, Addendum B](#)