

# **Dependent or Addicted?**

*An IMPORTANT Distinction!*  
*The Keeton Addiction Checklist ©*

**How can I tell if I am addicted to opioids or dependent on them and what is the difference?**

There is a lot of confusion about just what addiction is and how it differs from dependence and tolerance.

Here is some basic information and a checklist to help you decide if you have a problem.

## **Dependence:**

There are certain substances on which the human body will become dependent if given for a period of time. This is very commonly seen with nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol. It also occurs with cortisone and other medications, opioid medications, and many illegal substances.

When a person becomes dependent on any of these substances, they may experience withdrawal if the substance is abruptly discontinued. This is a physiologic response and it does NOT mean you are addicted just because you experience withdrawal.

## **Tolerance:**

Tolerance is another physiologic response whereby one requires an increase of a substance over time to get the same effect. We frequently experience this with our morning shower. When we first get in the water is too hot, but within a short period of time it is not hot enough.

College freshmen can easily become inebriated with one beer, but as they become upper classmen, they can drink several beers with little effect. This too is tolerance.

Tolerance also has nothing to do with addiction.

## **Addiction:**

Addiction is the compulsive & continued use of a substance or activity, despite harm to the individual, their family or their community.

It results in **total loss of control** and **total preoccupation** with the substance or activity. It is the first thing an addict thinks about in the morning when he wakes up and the last thing she thinks about before going to bed at night.

There is a **constant craving** for the substance or activity and the addict **can never get enough, and always wants more.**

Addiction to alcohol, illegal substances, prescription pain medications, gambling and sex have destroyed the careers and lives of professional athletes, Hollywood stars and even TV evangelists.

Addiction to the prescription opioid pain medications is a serious problem, which has now reached epidemic proportions.

**Most people that use opioids on daily basis will be dependent on them, but not everyone dependent on opioids are addicted to them.**

The easiest way to decide if you are dependent on opioids is whether or not you go into withdrawal if you abruptly stop taking them or decrease them.

## Signs and symptoms of withdrawal

	YES	NO
Feel bad, like having the flu		
Yawning		
Runny nose		
Nausea and/or vomiting		
Diarrhea		
Chills or “goose bumps”		
Muscle Aches or Cramps		
Anxiety		

If you have any of these symptoms, you are likely in withdrawal and are probably dependent on opioids, but not necessarily addicted to them.

If you are concerned about your potential dependence on opioids, you can speak with your physician.

## Early Warning Signs of Addiction

	YES	NO
Neglecting responsibilities at school, work or home		
Flunking classes, skipping work or neglecting your family and children		
Decrease in performance at work or school		
Lack of motivation		
Getting into legal trouble for disorderly conduct, or getting DUI's		
Getting additional medication from other sources such as friends, co-workers, another doctor, Emergency Rooms or buying them on the street		
Losing interest in your regular activities, hobbies, sports, family or friends		
Problems with relationships or having fights with your spouse, partner, or family members		
Having problems with your boss or co-workers		
Losing friends or sudden change in friends and interest		
Losing interest hobbies, sports or other previously enjoyed activities		
Deterioration of grooming and personal appearance		
Changes in personality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mood swings, irritability, angry or sullen</li> <li>- Anxious, lethargic or changes in attitude</li> <li>- Lethargic or hyperactive</li> </ul>		

If you are having any of these symptoms, then ask yourself these questions:

	YES	NO
Do I take more opioid medications than prescribed?		
Do I frequently run out of my medications before my next appointment?		
Do I exaggerate my symptoms in an effort to get more opioids than I actually need?		
Do I take my opioids when I feel tired, lonely or depressed?		
Do I take my opioids when I am bored or want to have more energy?		
Do I combine my opioids with other pain medications, tranquilizers, sleeping pills, alcohol, marijuana, or illegal drugs?		
Do I borrow opioids from friends?		
Do I get additional opioids from other doctors or ERs?		
Do I report my medications lost or stolen in an attempt to get additional medications?		
Do I get other pain meds or recreational drugs on the street?		
Do I take these medications in excess or inappropriately when driving, working, or taking care of children?		

If you answer “Yes” to any of these questions, then you need to discuss this with your physician or caregiver ASAP.

Please submit any comments or questions you have to [info@speakingofpain.net](mailto:info@speakingofpain.net)