



## Prevention of Opioid Abuse

Delta Dental recognizes that tackling the national opioid crisis will require ongoing collaboration across the dental, medical, law enforcement and education communities. As one of the nation's largest providers of dental benefits, Delta Dental has been and will continue to be a leading partner in the prevention of opioid abuse.

We believe that the most powerful partnership may actually be the most overlooked—the one between patient and medical provider. That's why we are aggressively distributing information about and coaching patients on the proper use and disposal of the prescription medications most commonly used by dentists.

The good news is that the number of opioid prescriptions nationally has been declining. A recent analysis of claims data of 1,000 insured dental patients, published by the American Dental Association (ADA), however, shows that dentists have written more prescriptions for opioids since 2010, and that they are the most likely medical professionals to prescribe opioids to 11- to 18-year-olds.<sup>1</sup>

Dentists are trained and licensed to provide prescription medicine safely and responsibly. They most frequently recommend over-the-counter products and prescribe non-narcotic pain relievers, antibiotics and anti-anxiety medications.

Delta Dental encourages dentists to stay vigilant and avoid prescribing opioids for nonsurgical procedures unless acetaminophen alone or in combination with a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) has failed to relieve pain. They should discuss with patients the risks and complications of any medications they prescribe and stay abreast of the guidelines about opioid use issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the ADA and state licensing boards.

Patients have the power—and the responsibility—to protect themselves, too.



Patients should:

- Share medical history openly, including any personal or family history of addiction and the use of recreational drugs.
- Update medication lists regularly; this helps dentists assess interactions between medicines.
- Take medications only as prescribed.
- Seek immediate help from a dentist if side effects or unexpected symptoms appear after a dental procedure.
- Discuss alternative pain management strategies, including the use of ibuprofen and acetaminophen, which can be equal to or more effective than opioids.
- Ask clarifying questions about confusing medical terms, diagnoses or instructions.
- Take an advocate to appointments; two sets of ears are always better than one to ensure understanding of a medical or dental procedure.
- Keep all medications away from children; store them out of sight and out of reach from young children. Do not disable child-proof containers.
- Pay especially close attention to teenagers who are given painkilling medication for dental procedures; make certain they are using the drug only as prescribed.
- Never share medications with others; it is dangerous and illegal.

Most opioid abuse happens because someone other than the patient uses the drug. Proper disposal of medications is critical, and too many people do not understand how to safely get rid of their surplus prescription medicine.

Some medications come with disposal directions. Pharmacists can also explain how to dispose of medications, including which ones should not be flushed down the toilet or put in household trash.



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Delta Dental of Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Tennessee