

**Signs of Opioid Dependence—Summary**  
**Behavioral Signs of Misuse**

**More predictive:**

- Selling prescription drugs
- Injecting oral formulations
- Multiple “lost” or “stolen” prescriptions
- Concurrent dependence on other drugs (illicit) or alcohol
- Stealing or borrowing medications from another patient
- Obtaining prescriptions from non-medical sources
- Prescription forgery
- Frequent self-initiated dose escalations

**Less predictive:**

- Aggressive need for higher doses
- Self-initiated dose escalations
- Psychic effects not intended by the prescriber
- Drug hoarding when pain symptoms are reduced
- Obtaining multiple prescriptions from multiple physicians (doctor shopping)
- Requests for specific opioids
- Unapproved use of a drug
- Use of multiple pharmacies

**On the lookout:**

Warning indicators of a possible problem with drug use

- Needle marks/tracks or “skin popping” scars
- Atrophied or perforated nasal septum
- Complaints of sexual dysfunction with no other cause found
- Sexually and needle transmitted diseases, including
- Endocarditis, Hepatitis, HIV/AIDS

Appearance of these indicators serves to alert you to potential problems.

They do not mean you should withhold appropriate care.

Laboratory results may suggest substance dependence:

1. Elevated MCV
2. Abnormal liver enzymes
3. Positive urine tests for drugs (Physicians must specifically request tests for any synthetic opioids, as many standard screens will not detect them)

Passik SD, Portenoy RK, Ricketts PL. Substance abuse issues in cancer patients. *Oncology*. 1998;12:517-521. 2. American Society of Addiction Medicine. Red flags for alcohol and drug abuse. Available at [www.asam.org/publ/CAGE.htm](http://www.asam.org/publ/CAGE.htm). Accessed January 29, 2002. 3. Weaver MF, Jarvis MAE, Schnoll SH. Role of the primary care physician in problems of substance abuse. *Arch Intern Med*. 1999;159:913-924

