

fast facts

OXYCONTIN

■ **Overview:** You'd have had to be *way* out in the boonies to have missed the media buzz about OxyContin® lately. And ironically, if that's where you were, that's one of the places you'd have been most likely to bump into the potent new painkiller. Its early user base in rural areas *did* earn it the made-for-media nickname of "hillbilly heroin," but OxyContin turned out to be anything *but* a regional problem or a media myth, and users in the real world

quickly proved it can cause the same type of abuse and addiction it was designed to prevent. Clearly, a fresh look at OxyContin is overdue. That's especially true since, like most drugs, OxyContin isn't all good *or* bad. Still, its darker, down side can be very dark and very down — and very hard to handle.



■ **Street Names:** *OC, Oxy, cotton, killer.*

■ **Appearance:** Tablets/caplets with "OC" embossed on one side, "10," "20," "40," "80" or "160" on the other. (Numbers reflect mg dosage.)

■ **Medical Uses:** OxyContin is used to reduce chronic pain, especially the pain associated with severe injuries, fractures, and cancer.



■ **Actions/Effects:** OxyContin differs from other forms of oxycodone (like Vicodin® and Percodan®) in only one way: The oxycodone in OxyContin is a “sustained-release” form of the drug, which means that OxyContin tablets pack higher doses of oxycodone than would otherwise be safe, since the drug is designed to be released more slowly. But users quickly discovered that, by simply chewing the tablets or crushing and sniffing them, all the oxycodone in a tablet can be released at once, in a huge, heroin-like rush of oblivion. And a new drug problem was born.



■ **Risks:** Defeating its sustained-release feature eliminates OxyContin’s safety margin, making it as addictive and deadly as other narcotics. Oxy abusers found out about *that* first, too, faster than the media could say, “hillbilly heroin.”

■ **Trends:** Although OxyContin has only been available as a prescription drug since 1996, it quickly found favor on the street. According to national surveys, 4.8 million Americans 12 and older admitted nonmedical use by 2008, while the number of high school seniors reporting use in the previous year stood at 4.9 percent in 2009.

■ **Demographics:** Since OxyContin is a form of oxycodone, its impact can best be seen by contrasting oxycodone-related emergency room admissions upon and after its 1996 introduction. According to the Drug Abuse Warning Network, the number of OxyContin-related admissions jumped from 3,290 in 1996 to 127,487 in 2008.



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