

Opioid Toxicity

Opioids are substances derived from the opium poppy, or synthetic analogues with similar effects. Examples are morphine, heroin, tramadol, oxycodone and methadone. Although opioids enjoy widespread use as potent analgesics, they have the potential for abuse because of their psychoactive properties .

Although the therapeutic and toxic doses are difficult to predict because of the development of tolerance with chronic use, the primary adverse event from excessive dosing is respiratory depression.

Currently, the widest clinical application of opioids is for acute or chronic pain relief. Opioids are available in various formulations that allow administration by virtually any route: epidural, inhalational, intranasal, intrathecal, oral, parenteral (ie, subcutaneous [SC], intravenous [IV], intramuscular [IM]), rectal, transdermal, and transmucosal. Patients also may benefit from several of the nonanalgesic effects engendered by certain opioids. For example, codeine and hydrocodone are widely used as antitussives, and diphenoxylate as an antidiarrheal.