Opioids are powerful drugs that decrease pain, but they can also lead to addiction and deadly overdose if not taken with care. If you need opioids after surgery, it is important to talk to your doctor about how to use them safely.

**Talk to your doctor before surgery.**
If you’re having urological surgery—such as surgery for prostate cancer or to remove a kidney stone—you will have a doctor’s appointment before the surgery. This is sometimes called a “pre-op” appointment. This is when you and your doctor should talk about how you will feel after surgery and whether or not you will need opioid pain medicine.

**If your doctor says opioids aren’t necessary.**
If your doctor thinks you won’t be in a lot of pain after surgery, other types of pain medicine may be needed. He or she may recommend over-the-counter pain relievers like acetaminophen (Tylenol and generic), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, and generic), and naproxen (Aleve and generic).

**If your doctor says opioids are necessary.**
If your doctor thinks you will be in a lot of pain after surgery, opioids might be the right choice. Opioids include hydrocodone (Vicodin and generic) and oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet, and generic). These medicines should only be used to treat extreme short-term pain, like the kind you may feel after surgery.

During your pre-op appointment, you and your doctor should also talk about all the medicines and supplements you already take and how much alcohol you drink. This will help make sure that you are taking any pain medicine safely.
If your doctor prescribes you opioid pain medicine, use and handle the medicine safely.

Start with the lowest dose and try to use them for three days or fewer. Stop taking them as soon as you feel better, and don’t keep any leftovers. Opioids can become less effective over time, so you might need higher and higher doses for pain relief.

Keep opioids out of everyone’s reach. Because of the risk of addiction and overdose, it’s not enough to use child-proof bottles and put them where kids can’t get to them. Instead, keep prescription pain medicine in a locked cabinet or container. Do not put loose pills in bags or containers in your purse, luggage, or drawers.

Get rid of leftover opioids properly. Do not throw opioids in the trash or flush them down the toilet. Many pharmacies, hospitals, clinics, and long-term care centers let you drop off leftover medication for free, without an appointment. Walgreens stores in most states offer free, secure, anonymous booths where you can drop off pill or liquid medicine for safe disposal. You can also buy a special envelope at stores, including Costco, CVS, and Rite-Aid, that you can use to mail leftover medicine to a disposal facility.

For other disposal options, call 800-882-9539 or visit https://takebackday.dea.gov.