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Choose physical therapy when:

- **The risks of opioid use outweigh the rewards.**

Potential side effects of opioids include depression, overdose, and addiction, plus withdrawal symptoms when stopping opioid use. Because of these risks, "experts agreed that opioids should not be considered first-line or routine therapy for chronic pain," the CDC guidelines state. Even in cases when evidence on the long-term benefits of non-opioid therapies is limited, "risks are much lower" with non-opioid treatment plans.

- **You want to do more than mask the pain.**

Opioids reduce the sensation of pain by interrupting pain signals to the brain. Physical therapists treat pain through movement while partnering with patients to improve or maintain their mobility and quality of life.

- **Your Pain or function problems are related to low back pain, hip or knee osteoarthritis, or fibromyalgia.**

The CDC cites "high-quality evidence" supporting exercise as part of a physical therapy treatment plan for those familiar conditions.

- **Even when your doctor prescribes you opioids for pain.**

Even in situations when opioids are prescribed, the CDC recommends that patients should receive "the lowest effective dosage," and opioids "should be combined" with nonopioid therapies, such as physical therapy.

- **Your pain lasts 90 days.**

At this point, the pain is considered "chronic," and the risks for continued opioid use increase. An estimated 116 million Americans have chronic pain each year.