



## Acute Pain Service

# Managing Acute Pain A Guide for Patients

The purpose of this leaflet is to explain the benefits and drawbacks of different types of pain control. It aims to help you to understand why managing pain is important for your recovery as well as your comfort.

### What is pain?

Pain is an unpleasant sensation. Everyone feels pain differently. The amount or type of pain you feel may not be the same as others feel, even if they have had the same operation or type of injury. Pain is a very personal feeling. It can be changed by things such as physical and emotional factors, culture and beliefs, previous pain experiences and mood.

### Acute pain sometimes:

- Makes you feel like staying still, but this can lead to complications such as stiff joints and muscles, constipation and blood clots in your legs (Deep Vein Thrombosis)
- Stops you breathing deeply, which may lead to a chest infection (pneumonia)
- Stops you sleeping well
- Makes you feel anxious about why it hurts
- Makes you feel miserable.

### Tell us about your pain

You should always tell a nurse or doctor about your pain before it becomes unbearable. The longer you wait, the worse it may get and become much more difficult to control and manage.

### Methods used to give pain relief

The purpose of your pain-relieving medicines is to reduce your pain to a level where you can undertake your daily living activities, not take away the pain completely.

There are a number of ways you can be given pain relief. This will depend on the cause of your pain and how bad it is. Usually it is in the form of tablets or liquids which need to be taken regularly to be effective.

### Should I take pain medication only when I have a lot of pain?

**No.** Don't wait until your pain becomes severe. It is easier to control when it is mild and before it gets out of control.

### How should I take pain relief medication?

You should take your pain medication as prescribed on a regular basis to get maximum effect and not just when you are in pain.

Remember you may not have pain whilst not moving, but think about how it may feel when you do move.

## What pain relief medication might I receive?

### Paracetamol

You may believe you need something 'stronger' than paracetamol; however it is very effective at relieving pain. It is important to take paracetamol regularly every 4 to 6 hours rather than a one-off dose.

Paracetamol is used to treat mild to moderate pain.

It can be combined with other pain medications such as Ibuprofen to relieve more severe pain.

### Anti-inflammatory pain medication

Anti-inflammatories are sometimes called **NSAIDs**, or just 'anti-inflammatories'. They include Ibuprofen and Naproxen.

They help relieve pain and reduce inflammation (redness and swelling).

Taking NSAIDs regularly for five days may mean that you require less strong pain medicines (opioids), which lead to fewer side effects.

### Opioids

Opioids refer to morphine and 'morphine-type' medication.

They are often used to treat moderate to severe pain after surgery or injury.

They can be taken in different forms – injections, liquids, tablets or slow release capsules.

The correct dose of any medicine is the lowest dose that produces a noticeable benefit. It is not usual to get complete relief of pain with opioids.

Paracetamol and NSAIDs may be given to you as well as opioids. This may reduce the amount of opioid required to manage your pain, leading to fewer side effects.

### Will I become addicted to opioids?

**No.** It is very rare to become addicted when taking 'morphine-like' medication to relieve pain for short periods only. It is important not to take more than you need to control your pain.

### What side effects am I likely to experience from the opioids?

They may include one or more of the following:

- Tiredness
- Light-headedness
- Dizziness
- Vivid dreams
- Feeling sick and vomiting
- Itchiness
- Constipation

If you are affected do tell a nurse, doctor or pharmacist as other medicines can be given to help treat these problems.

## Breakthrough pain

It is important to control background pain and an additional medicine for **breakthrough** pain may be prescribed to help this. 'Breakthrough pain' is when you experience bursts of pain. It is important you tell the nurses if you are experiencing this and they can give you some additional pain relief.

## When you go home

Paracetamol and Ibuprofen can be obtained from your local pharmacy. Always take pain relief as stated on the packet; do not exceed the stated dose.

**If you are still experiencing severe pain and have finished the opioid medicine provided by the hospital, please contact your GP or discuss with your Community Pharmacist.**

## How should I store medicines at home?

- Keep in the original container and store at room temperature in a dry place
- Keep out of the sight and reach of children
- Never give your medicine to anyone else.

## What should I do with any unused medicine?

- Return any unused medicine to your community pharmacist for safe disposal
- Do not flush unused medicines down the toilet or throw them away.

## Contact Numbers:

If you have any further questions about your discharge medicines after you have left the hospital please:

**Telephone the hospital pharmacy: 01305 255294** Monday to Friday: 9.00am to 5.00pm  
**Or speak to your Community Pharmacist**

## About this leaflet:

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If you have feedback regarding the accuracy of the information contained in this leaflet, or if you would like a list of references used to develop this leaflet, please email [pals@dchft.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@dchft.nhs.uk)



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