



Pharmacy

Opioids for Acute Pain Relief

Introduction

Opioids are 'morphine-type' medications, used to relieve acute, severe pain. They are for short term use, up to one week, because your pain should reduce. You will have been given either:

- **Morphine Sulphate solution 10mg in 5mL, or**
- **Oxycodone liquid 5mg in 5mL, or**
- **Immediate release morphine orodispersible Tablets**

Opioid medicines should be used for a short time after surgery or serious injury to relieve acute pain. They should be used with other painkillers as they work together to give better pain relief.

The aim is to reduce pain levels so you can move around and do activities of daily living such as getting around at home and cooking.

Opioid medicines are unlikely to get rid of your pain completely. Severe pain should not last long and normally gets a little better each day.

Advice

- As your body begins to heal a little each day, you should take less opioid medicine.
- **Do not take for longer than a week. If you are concerned about your pain or continue to have severe pain you should discuss with your GP, at any stage.**
- You may have also been given (or advised to take) paracetamol. Take this regularly four times a day and add in the opioid medicine when you need it to help manage your pain better.
- You may have also been given (or advised to take) a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicine e.g. ibuprofen or naproxen. Take this regularly, with the paracetamol too and add in the opioid medicine when you need it to help manage your pain better.
- Continue to take your other regular medication as advised.

- Do not start taking additional painkillers that contain codeine, dihydrocodeine or tramadol, unless advised by your doctor or you were taking these before your hospital admission. You will be more likely to get side effects.
- Do not start taking additional medicines to help you sleep, such as benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam, lorazepam, temazepam, zopiclone), unless advised by your doctor or you were taking these before your hospital admission. These medicines increase the risk of drowsiness or sedation.

How should I take my opioid medicine?

You should only take opioid medicines for severe pain. The opioid works quickly - it should take 15-30 minutes to get pain relief which then lasts around 4 hours. Always follow the instructions on the label and never take a larger dose or use more often than advised on the label.

Use the measuring device provided to measure your dose (after use, wash the device with warm soapy water, rinse and leave to dry).

Are there any side effects?

Sickness (nausea) - Try taking your medicine with or just after a snack or meal.

Constipation - Make sure you are drinking plenty of water and try to include more high fibre food in your diet unless otherwise advised by the hospital. You may need a laxative if constipation is a problem.

Feeling sleepy or dizzy - This is common. If affected, do not attempt to complete complex tasks, such as operating machinery, or even boiling a kettle. **Do NOT drive.** Drowsiness (or sedation) can be an indication that you have taken too much opioid. Make sure your family or carer is aware of the need to follow the advice below should sedation become a problem.

If you are awake and alert:	If you are mildly sedated and easy to rouse:	If you are frequently asleep or drowsy on waking but will follow commands, or if you are unable to remain awake:	If you are difficult to rouse or unarousable, or if you are unable to, or finding it difficult to follow commands:
No action is required	No action is required	Contact your GP or phone 111 for advice	Phone 999

Contact your GP practice, Community Pharmacy, or phone 111 if you are concerned about any side effects.

Can I have an alcoholic drink?

Do not drink any alcohol as this could increase drowsiness.

Will I become addicted?

If you are taking an opioid medicine to relieve pain, and for a short time only, you will NOT become addicted. It is important that you do not take more than you need. You should not need to take for longer than a week. If you are still in severe pain after a week, you should see your doctor.

How should I store opioid 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 opioid medicine?

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

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