Patient Information

Information for patients prescribed Opioids (excluding Tramadol)

What are opioids used for?
Opioids are strong medications used to treat acute pain (short term pain). The opioids we use are codeine, morphine, fentanyl, oxycodone and buprenorphine, which have many different brand names, some of which are listed below.

Tramadol works partly as an opioid, but has other ways of working. Please see the tramadol information leaflet.

**Codeine**
- Codeine Phosphate

**Morphine**
- Zomorph (slow release)
- MST (slow release)
- Oramorph (immediate release)
- Sevredol (immediate release)

**Oxycodone**
- Longtec (slow release)
- Oxycontin (slow release)
- Shortec (immediate release)
- Oxynorm (immediate release)

**Fentanyl**
- Durogesic (patch - slow release)
- Matrifen (patch - slow release)

**Buprenorphine**
- BuTrans (patch - slow release)
- BuTec (patch - slow release)
- Transtec (patch - slow release)

When and how should I take my opioids?
You should take your opioids as directed by your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist. Do not take more than prescribed.

How long does it take to work?
This is very dependent on the type of opioid you are prescribed and the way it is administered. Discuss with your prescriber or refer to the information leaflet in your medication packet.

What are the side effects of opioids?
Side effects can be a problem. If you have concerns or side effects are severe, please seek urgent medical assistance.

**Common side effects**
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Constipation
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Itching
- Difficultly passing urine
- Decreased appetite
- Skin irritation with patches

**Less common side effects**
- Reduced breathing rate/stop breathing
- Rashes
- Decreased libido or potency
- Mood changes
- Dry mouth
- Indigestion
- Sweating
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Facial flushing
- Vertigo
- Bradycardia (slow heart rate)
- Tachycardia (fast heart rate)
- Palpitations
- Tremor
- Fainting
- Feeling uneasy
- Hypotension (low blood pressure)
- Hypothermia (low body temperature)
- Pin point pupils
- Delirium/hallucinations (more common in the elderly)

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**Can I take it long-term?**

Opioids are not recommended in the management of long term pain (chronic pain). If you are prescribed opioid medication. It will need regular review and monitoring by your doctor or prescriber. If you would like to read more about opioids and pain management, the website ‘Opioids Aware’ is available at this address https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/faculty-of-pain-medicine/opioids-aware.

**Can I drink alcohol?**

Alcohol and opioids both can cause sleepiness and poor concentration. You should avoid alcohol completely when you first start on opioids or when your dose has been increased. When you are on a steady dose of opioid, you should be able to drink modest amounts of alcohol without getting any extra unusual side effects.

If you are taking opioids you should avoid alcohol if you are going to drive or use tools or machinery.

**Can I drive?**

It is advised that you do not drive if you have recently started taking opioids or if you have recently changed doses. However, it remains the responsibility of all drivers, including patients to consider whether they believe their driving may be impaired on every occasion when they drive.

**Do not drive** if you experience any of the below symptoms:
- Sleepiness/drowsiness
- Poor coordination
- Impaired or slow thinking
- Dizziness
- Visual problems

It is important to recognise impairment can develop at low doses of opioids, especially if combining different medications with additional drowsy effects or combining medications with alcohol.
We would strongly advise you to contact your motor insurance provider and DVLA, to notify them of your current health conditions and the prescribed medications you are taking to ensure your insurance remains valid and legal.

**What should I tell the doctor?**

- If you are allergic to any medications.
- What medications you are taking, including over the counter and herbal medications.
- Any illicit drugs you may be taking.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or planning to become pregnant in the future.
- If you have kidney problems.
- If you have or had a history of excessive alcohol use, recreational drug use or addiction to prescription or over the counter medication.

**Can I become addicted?**

There is always a small potential risk of addiction. You are at an increased risk of addiction if you take your opioids inappropriately.

**People who are addicted to opioids can:**

- Feel out of control about how much medicine they take or how often they take it.
- Crave the drug.
- Continue to take the drug even when it has no improvement in their pain or a negative effect on their physical or mental health.

If you are concerned that you are becoming addicted please talk to your doctor immediately.

**What do I do if I want to stop taking opioids?**

Do not stop taking your opioids suddenly as you may experience symptoms of withdrawal. Discuss stopping/reducing your opioid medication with your doctor who will be able to support the gradual reduction and stopping of your medication.

**Where can I find more information on opioids?**

- Please ask your prescriber for more information.
- Your pharmacist can answer your questions.
- Your medication packet will contain a patient information leaflet for you to read.
- A good website to use is the Electronic Medical Compendium (search for EMC) or go directly to https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/

**Will my body get used to opioid medicines?**

Opioids can become less effective with time (this is called tolerance). This means that your body has become used to the pain-relieving effect of the medicine.

With higher doses you can become dependent on opioid medicines (dependence). This means that if you stop taking the drug suddenly, or lower the dose too quickly, you can get symptoms of withdrawal.

**Symptoms include:**

- Tiredness
- Sweating

- A runny nose
- Stomach cramps
- Diarrhoea
- Aching muscles
Further reading

- **Opioids Aware**: A resource for patients and healthcare professionals to support prescribing of opioid medicines for pain guidance - [https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/faculty-of-pain-medicine/opioids-aware](https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/faculty-of-pain-medicine/opioids-aware)

- Driving whilst taking opioids - [https://www.gov.uk/grug-driving-law](https://www.gov.uk/grug-driving-law)

- Department for Transport. Guidance for healthcare professionals on drug driving. 2014

- ‘Live well With Pain’ - [https://livewellwithpain.co.uk/](https://livewellwithpain.co.uk/)