

Information for Patients

# Opioid Medicine



**This leaflet has been given to you as you are taking an opioid medicine. It is to help you take your opioid medicine correctly and safely.**

## What are opioids?

Opioids are medicines which help ease pain. We usually give them to patients who have pain for a short amount of time. Some patients may take them for longer, such as those with cancer. Taking opioids for a long time can cause side effects. Over time, your body may also get used to the medicine and it may not work as well (tolerance).

Examples include:

- codeine (including co-codamol)
- dihydrocodeine
- co-dydramol
- tramadol
- morphine
- oxycodone
- buprenorphine
- fentanyl

## How can I take opioids safely?

Take the medicine as you have been told.

- **Do not take more than you should as this can lead to an overdose.** If you do, contact your GP or 111.
- **Taking opioids can make you drowsy.** If this happens you should not drive or use heavy machinery. For more information see; <https://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law>
- **Do not drink alcohol or take other medicines that can make you drowsy,** unless told by your doctor or pharmacist.

## What side effects may I experience?

When you first take opioids, you may get some side effects. These usually stop after a few days. They include feeling sleepy, dizzy, confused, and feeling or being sick. Sometimes these side effects may go on longer. If this happens you should contact your GP, local pharmacy or 111.

Opioids can cause problems if you take them for a long time. These may include:

- Not able to poo (constipation) -you can take laxatives to help
- Itching
- Putting on weight
- Lack of sex drive
- Problems breathing when you are lying down sleeping

If you get any serious side effects, contact your GP or 111.

## How long should I take opioids for?

Your doctor or pharmacist will tell you how long you should take the medicine for. If you are given opioids for a long time you should have regular check-ups.

You should not take opioids for longer than you need to. They can be helpful for some people living with pain for a long time. However, they can cause other serious problems, such as addiction.

Many people who take opioids for a long time find they can slowly lower the amount they take. They find that their pain is no worse. As they have fewer side effects, this can improve quality of life, leading to improved physical fitness.

## What if I want to stop taking an opioid?

If you have been taking opioids for a long time, do not stop taking them suddenly. This can cause unpleasant side effects. Get advice from your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. They will be able to advise you on how to stop your medicine slowly.

## How else can I manage my pain?

There are many choices to manage pain, other than taking medicines. These include:

- Gentle exercise
- Hot or cold packs
- Try distracting yourself, for example, doing a puzzle, reading, knitting
- Get a good night's sleep
- Talk about how you are feeling

## Where can I get more information about taking opioids?

- **Faculty of Pain Medicine:** Taking opioids for pain: <https://fpm.ac.uk/opioids-aware-information-patients/taking-opioids-pain>
- **Live well with pain:** <https://livewellwithpain.co.uk/>
- **NHS medicines website:** <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/>

## Further information is available from:



### Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback which can be shared in a number of ways through the hospital website. Scan the QR code to give feedback. [www.sath.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/patient-experience/feedback-hub/](http://www.sath.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/patient-experience/feedback-hub/)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS will act on your behalf when handling patient and family concerns, they can also help you get support from other local or national agencies. PALS, is a confidential service.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Tel: [0800 783 0057](tel:08007830057) or [01743 261691](tel:01743261691)

Princess Royal Hospital, Tel: [01952 282888](tel:01952282888)

## Other Sources of Information

### NHS 111

A fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

111 (free from a landline or mobile) [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Self Help & Support Groups

A selection of websites providing access to good quality health information, local organisations and community groups is available from the library. [www.library.sath.nhs.uk/find/patients/](http://www.library.sath.nhs.uk/find/patients/)

### Information in Other Languages or Formats

If you require this information in a different way such as easy read, a different language, larger print, audio or braille please tell a member of staff or contact the Patient Experience Team;

[sath.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:sath.patientexperience@nhs.net) or [01743 261000](tel:01743261000) ext. 2503.

## Your information

Information about you and your healthcare is held by the NHS. You can find out more about how we hold your information and how it is used on our website: [www.sath.nhs.uk](http://www.sath.nhs.uk)

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