

## Is it safe to take other medicines while on an opioid?

Opioids may increase the effects of other medicines that make you sleepy or dizzy. Tell your healthcare professionals what other medicines you take.

## Can I drink alcohol when I'm taking an opioid?

It is recommended you avoid alcohol while taking opioids as effects like dizziness or sleepiness can worsen. Talk to your doctor if you want to discuss this further.

## Can I become addicted to opioids?

Addiction is not a problem when the right dose is taken for the right reason and reviewed correctly. If you no longer need an opioid, your doctor will support you to reduce it gradually. Do not stop taking it suddenly without medical advice.

## How should I store opioids?

Where possible, keep your medication in the original box. Store in a dry place, below 25°C and out of reach of children and pets. Return unused medication to your pharmacy. If possible, keep in a locked box.

## How do I get more opioids?

Contact your GP to arrange a prescription. Take this to your community pharmacy. Do not let your supply run out before requesting the prescription.

# Opioids in supportive & palliative care

## Information Leaflet for Patients

### What are opioids used for?

Opioids are pain relieving medications. They may also be used for other symptoms eg. shortness of breath.

There are many different types and strengths of opioids. Examples include: morphine, oxycodone, hydromorphone, alfentanil, fentanyl, methadone and buprenorphine.

Opioids are most commonly used for people who experience moderate or severe pain. They can be used at any stage of your illness.

### Notes



**This medicine is ONLY FOR YOU. Never give it to anyone else even if their symptoms appear to be the same as yours.**

## How do I take my opioid?

Opioids can be given in various forms eg. tablets, capsules, liquids, patches, injections. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will explain how to take your medication.

Your health professional will decide the dose and how often you should take it. They may adjust it depending on your symptoms. Different people will need different doses of opioid to help control their symptoms. The dose of your opioid may be increased or decreased depending on your symptoms and any side effects. The prescriber will discuss any changes with you.

You may be prescribed a long-acting opioid, which should be taken regularly at set times. This gives you background pain relief. You may also be prescribed a short-acting opioid. This can be taken if needed in between doses of your long-acting opioid.

If you are taking an oral liquid opioid, use an oral syringe to measure the correct dose. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist should show you how to do this.

If your opioid is not working as well as expected, contact your health professional. Do not take more than they tell you, as this could cause side effects.

## What if I miss a dose of my regular opioid?

If you forget to take a dose, ask a health professional for advice. Never take a double dose.

## What are the common side effects?

All medicines can cause side effects, though not everyone gets them.

- Constipation is common when taking opioids, so it is important that you take a regular laxative as well. Speak to your health professional if your bowels are not moving normally
- Some people feel sick or may vomit when they first start taking an opioid. This often gets better after a few days. Anti-sickness medication can help this. Ask your health professional for advice
- When starting an opioid or after a dose increase, you may feel drowsy, have difficulty concentrating or feel dizzy. If you are very sleepy contact your doctor
- If you become confused, keep falling asleep, have hallucinations or vivid dreams, or have jerking movements, you must seek urgent medical attention.

## Can I drive when I'm taking an opioid?

**You** are responsible for ensuring you are fit to drive. If you are unsure about your fitness to drive, you should discuss this with your health professional.

Northern Ireland law allows you to drive when taking medicines if your ability is not affected. Do not drive or use machinery if:

- You have recently started taking an opioid
- The dose or frequency has changed recently
- Within four hours of taking a short acting opioid
- You have taken alcohol
- You feel drowsy or sleepy or cannot concentrate.

Advice is available at NI Direct:

