

Can I develop an addiction

Addiction to opioids that have been prescribed and taken for pain relief appears to be rare. Regular use of opioids or suffering from withdrawal effects on stopping the opioid suddenly is not the same as addiction. You should keep these drugs locked safe from someone who has an addiction problem and also out of reach of children.

Will I be able to stop taking them?

Some people need to take opioids for a long term. You may find that if opioids give you pain relief, you will feel that you rely on them. This is normal, but if you wish to try reducing your opioid dose, you should discuss with your doctor and follow a plan of gradual dose reduction. Many people find that after a few months they can reduce their dose without an increase in pain. They are best withdrawn slowly over several weeks in gradual steps to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

Further information

Further information along with other publications about persistent pain is available on the following web sites:

www.britishpainsociety.org

www.painrelieffoundation.org.uk

This information was correct at the time of printing. While the Trust makes every reasonable effort to keep its information leaflets up to date, very recent changes may not yet be reflected in the guidance and you should discuss this with the clinical staff at the time of your appointment.

Date of publication: April 2007
Reviewed: January 2012
Reviewed: April 2015
Review date: April 2018
CGSG: April 2007
Ref: 060/07
City Hospitals Sunderland

OPIOIDS

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Directorate : Theatre, Chronic pain

City Hospitals Sunderland

This leaflet is designed to offer you basic information about the medication you are being started on. For more details, ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse or read the manufacturer's information leaflet that comes along with your medication.

What are they for?

Opioids are strong pain-killers from the morphine family that can help in many painful conditions. There are different types of opioids and your doctor may need to try different opioids before finding the one that suits you.

How can they help me?

You might benefit from using opioids to help reduce your pain and return to a more normal life. It is important not to expect too much out of these medications. Opioids need to be only a part of the overall plan aimed at returning to a more normal life. This plan might include regular activity and setting some attainable goals in terms of what you are doing in your life.

The full effects of pain relief may take several weeks to build up, so please give the treatment a chance to work. If the first opioid drug is not helpful, the doctor may suggest trying a different one.

How should I take it?

Most opioids are available as tablets or capsules to be taken by mouth, while some others are used by applying a patch onto the skin. In order for you to tolerate this drug with minimal side effects, the medication may be started at a very small dose and gradually increased to reach an effective dose over a period of few weeks. If you feel that you need to take more of the medicine, discuss this with your doctor. Taking extra doses in between the fixed doses may lead to a need for higher and higher doses.

The patches are best applied over the outer aspect of your upper arm or torso and left undisturbed for the prescribed period. It is removed after the prescribed period and a new patch applied over a similar area on the opposite side. The skin should be cleaned by a

normal wash with soap-water and dried before application of the patch, but do not apply the patch over broken skin.

Are there any risks or side effects?

The most common side effects of opioids are drowsiness, confusion, itching, nausea or constipation. You may need some medicine from your doctor if you feel sick when you first start opioids, but the feeling of sickness usually wears off after the first few days. You may need regular laxatives to overcome the constipation.

There are some rare side effects that you should be aware of. Opioids taken over a long term have been known to make people sexually less active or even infertile. The body's immune response is reduced. However, these problems usually go away on stopping the opioids.

Some babies born to women on long term opioids can find it difficult to breathe at birth and may need specialist help.

Opioids are sedating which can potentiate the effects of alcohol. Hence, care needs to be taken with regards to amount of alcohol consumption, working with heavy machinery and driving.

The law in the UK allows you to drive if you are taking opioids. However, you are responsible for making sure that you are fit to drive. The Driving and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) can advise you about your legal right to hold a driving license. You should let DVLA know that you are taking opioid medicines.

How do I start to use opioids?

Decide what you reasonably feel that you would like to achieve in your life and think how using opioids can help you. Set yourself some realistic goals. Opioids will not take your pain away completely. The aim is for them to be part of an overall plan aimed at reducing your pain enough for you to lead a more normal life.