

## Opioid medicines- Controlled Drugs

**This leaflet relates to the following medicines:**

This leaflet is to help support you in using opioid medicines safely. Please keep it in a safe place. Patients, family, friends, and carers can play an important role in the safe use of these medicines and in reducing the risk of harm. Please share this information with them.

### What are Opioids?

Opioids are a type of medicine that help relieve pain. They are very effective over short periods to relieve moderate to severe pain. They are also sometimes prescribed for long periods to relieve pain in serious conditions.

Examples of opioids include codeine (including co-codamol), tramadol, oxycodone, fentanyl, and morphine. Opioids have a serious risk of addiction, especially with long-term use. The person who prescribed an opioid or your pharmacist should explain how long it is safe for you to take your medicine for. Opioids must only be taken by the person they are prescribed for. For further information on using opioids safely, and a full list of possible side effects, read the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) that came with your medicine, and keep it handy.

Opioids can be prescribed as:

- tablets, capsules or liquids to be taken by mouth
- patches to be put on your skin
- injections to be given by the doctor or nurse
- lozenges to be sucked
- nasal sprays
- suppositories

### How can I take my medicine safely?

Only take the medicine as directed.

- Do not increase the dose or take an extra dose
- Do not take any other medicines that contain opioids to “top up” your pain relief
- Do not take opioid medicines if you are pregnant without health professional advice
- Always follow the directions on the label to ensure you take the correct dose. For liquids, always ensure the dose is measured out properly and never take a ‘swig from the bottle’. Your pharmacist can provide a measuring cup or spoon. For patches, always ensure that the last patch is removed before applying a new one.

Taking more than you should can lead to overdose. If you have any questions about your opioid medicine or side effects, or if you do not understand how to take your medicine, talk to the person who prescribed your opioid medicine or to a pharmacist. Keep talking to them about your pain – there may be different treatments that can help.

- Do not allow others to take any opioid medicines given to you. Your medicine has been prescribed or specifically recommended for you by your doctor or pharmacist and can be dangerous if taken by other people – it could even cause fatal overdose.
- **Always keep medicines out of sight and reach of children.**

## What side effects might I expect?

Common side effects in this group of medicines may include:

- nausea
- constipation
- transient drowsiness (short-lasting)
- addiction
- difficulty breathing

Opioids may make you feel drowsy or affect your ability to concentrate, so driving or operating heavy equipment/machinery should be avoided, if affected.

If you suffer from any undesirable side effects, please speak to the pharmacist, nurse or doctor. Do not stop medication suddenly.

## How do I know if I'm becoming addicted?

Addiction can happen gradually. It can make you feel that you are no longer in control of how much medicine you need to take or how often you need to take it. You might feel that you need to carry on taking your medicine, even when it doesn't help to relieve your pain. Talk to your doctor if your pain is becoming difficult to manage as your body may not be sensing its pain-relieving effect. This is referred to as 'opioid tolerance' and could be an early warning sign you may be at risk of becoming addicted.

Signs that you may be addicted to opioids include:

- Craving for the medicine
- Feeling that you need to take more medicine than prescribed or as instructed on the medicine packaging
- Feeling that you need to take additional medicines containing opioids or other pain relief medicines to achieve the same relief
- Taking opioid medicines for reasons other than pain relief

Experiencing withdrawal side effects when you stop taking the medicine suddenly.

If you notice any of the above, talk to your doctor or a pharmacist.

Withdrawal side effects may include a combination of the following: Shivers, diarrhoea, difficulty sleeping, sweating, widespread or increased pain, body aches, irritability and agitation, nausea and vomiting.

## What to do when medicines are no longer required

Controlled drugs, as with all medicines, need to be disposed of in a safe way. All unused controlled drugs should be returned to your local community pharmacy for safe disposal. If you are unable to take the medicines to the community pharmacy yourself, a relative, friend, neighbour or carer can do this on your behalf.

## What to do in an emergency

If somebody else has taken your controlled drug or you have taken more than the prescribed dose, contact your local community pharmacist, doctor or local Emergency Department (A&E) for advice.

In an emergency, dial **999** for an ambulance.

Alternatively, call **NHS 111** by dialling **111** (available 24 hours).

**If an ambulance has been called, please remember to keep any medicines (and their containers) that have been taken to show the doctor, nurse or paramedic.**

## Sources of information

Further information can be obtained from:

- Pharmacy Department, Conquest Hospital, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust  
Tel: 0300 131 5184
- Pharmacy Department, Eastbourne District General Hospital, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust Tel: 0300 131 5636
- NHS 111
- Your GP
- Your Local Pharmacy

## Important information

### Collecting your prescription

When you receive new supplies of your controlled drug, always remember to check the name and strength to ensure you have been given the correct medicine. If in any doubt, speak to your pharmacist for advice. You may be asked to provide proof of identity when collecting a prescription for certain controlled drugs.

### Keeping a List of Current Medications

Always keep an up-to-date list of your current medication and take this to all health-related appointments. If you are admitted to hospital or the hospice, take all your medication with you (in the original containers with the labels intact). It is important to let any doctors and nurses looking after you know which medicines, including controlled drugs, you are taking. They will need to know how much and how often you are taking them and whether you have experienced any side effects.

### Changing or Stopping your Prescriptions

If you would like to reduce or stop taking your controlled drug, please discuss this with your doctor.

### Obtaining further supplies

Remember that if you are unable to pick up further supplies of your controlled drug, you will need to make alternative arrangements with your pharmacist. If you have agreed with your pharmacist that someone else will be collecting your prescription, they may be asked to provide proof of their identity.

### Other medicines

You can check whether your controlled drug interacts with other medicines you are taking by reading the leaflet you are given with the medicine. You can also ask your pharmacist, prescriber, or nurse if you have any concerns.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the patient experience team on 0300 131 4784 or [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net).

## Hand hygiene

We are committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

## Other formats

**If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department on 0300 131 4434 or [esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net)**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your pharmacist, nurse or doctor.

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## Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

Dr Barclay, Consultant for Palliative medicine

ESHT Inpatient Pain team

ESHT Palliative Care Team

The directorate group that have agreed this patient information leaflet:

Medicines Optimisation Group

Next review date: January 2027

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