

Opioid patient information leaflet

What are opioid medications?

They are powerful pain-relieving medications. They are useful when other pain killers are not effective.

Some examples of opioids include:

- Codeine
- Dihydrocodeine
- Tramadol
- Morphine
- Fentanyl

Are opioids the best painkillers?

Opioids are very strong pain killers, but are not suitable for all types of pain. Some pains (e.g. nerve pain) are better treated with other pain killers (e.g. amitriptyline, gabapentin) on their own or in addition to opioids. Your doctor will help to decide which pain killers are most appropriate for you to take.

Will these medications take away my pain completely?

The aim of the treatment is to reduce the pain so that you can do more of your daily activities, not to take away the pain completely. These medications are commonly used with other pain killers (particularly regular paracetamol) to boost their effect and reduce side effects.

What are the side effects of opioids?

Common side effects of opioids include drowsiness, dizziness and constipation. If you feel drowsy or dizzy do not drive, operate machinery or do any other jobs or activities that could be dangerous if you are not fully alert. **It is against the law to drive if your ability is impaired by your medication.** Constipation can be prevented by eating a diet with sufficient fibre and drinking plenty of water, but sometimes you may need a gentle laxative to help with this side effect.

Are these drugs safe to use?

Opioids are safe to use when taken with the guidance of a qualified healthcare professional. You should never take more of these medications than your doctor has advised you to use. Do not 'share' these medicines with anyone else. Overdose of opioids can result in breathing difficulties, fits, loss of consciousness and even death.

Can I become addicted to opioids?

Opioids are very effective when used for short periods of time. If you use them for longer time periods there is a risk that you may become addicted to or dependent on these medications (a need to keep taking the medicine). If you take opioids for a long time, you can become used to the effects and if you suddenly stop taking them you may get withdrawal symptoms such as agitation, anxiety, palpitations, shaking and sweating. If you want to stop taking these tablets, discuss this with your doctor first so that you can gradually reduce the dose, to minimise unpleasant side effects.

For more general information about pain see The British Pain Society website www.britishpainsociety.org

Always read the label and the leaflet inside the box. Make sure you know exactly what the medicine is, what it is for and how to safely use it. Some opioids may not be suitable for people taking other medicines – if in doubt, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.