

Contact details

Forest Holme Hospice
5 Seldown Road, Poole BH15 1TS
Telephone number: 01202 448118

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an information prescription or contact:

The Health Information Centre
Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Longfleet Road
Poole, Dorset BH15 2JB
Telephone: 01202 448003
www.poole.nhs.uk

We can supply this information in other formats, in larger print, on audiotape, or have it translated for you. Please call the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01202 448499, text 07758 272495 or email pals@poole.nhs.uk for advice.

If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Experience team confidentially: phone 01202 448003, write to the Health Information Centre (address above), or email healthinfo@poole.nhs.uk.

Author: Dr Beverley Lee
Poole Palliative Care Service
Date: August 2014
Review Date: August 2017
Version number: 1

Forest Holme Hospice Patient information

Opioid treatment for pain in Palliative Care



Will I become addicted or tolerant to opioids? When opioids are used for their purpose of controlling pain there is no evidence to suggest they cause addiction. You will not become tolerant to opioids, but if your pain worsens you may have to take an increased dose.

I wish to stop taking my opioids: If you consider reducing or stopping your opioids, it is advisable that you do so in discussion with your doctor or Palliative Care nurse. It is preferable to reduce the doses gradually in a planned way, so you do not get withdrawal effects from stopping too quickly.

Storage: It is recommended that opioids are stored in a safe, dry place out of the reach of children or pets.

This leaflet has been written with reference to the guidelines on strong opioids from the UK's National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). You can find more information on their website:

www.nice.org.uk/cg140

Their patient leaflet can be found on:

<http://guidance.nice.org.uk/CG140/PublicInfo/doc/English>

Introduction

This booklet has been given to you because you are either being started on, or are already taking a medicine known as a strong opioid. The healthcare professional who provides you with this booklet will explain the information contained in it.

What are opioids?

Opioids are commonly used to relieve pain and can also be used to relieve breathlessness or cough at any stage of a person's illness.

Opioids can come in many preparations, such as liquid, tablets, capsules, ampoules for injection and patches. Common examples of strong opioids are:

- Morphine
- Diamorphine
- Fentanyl
- Oxycodone
- Buprenorphine

Do opioids always work for pain?

Some types of pain may not respond to opioids and you may require a different type of painkiller. Your doctor or Palliative Care nurse will review your response to prescribed painkillers.

How to take opioids

Quick acting opioids: (Oramorph, Sevredol, OxyNorm). These work on your pain within 30 minutes. Relief can last for up to 4 hours.

Your doctor or Palliative Care nurse may advise you to take these regularly throughout the day. They are also used to control any 'breakthrough' pain you may experience, despite taking regular painkillers.

Slow acting opioids: (Zomorph, MST, OxyContin). These release into your blood stream gradually usually over a 12 hour period. They should be taken at regular times each day.

Syringe driver (pump): Opioids can be given as an injection and used in a subcutaneous pump which gives a continuous infusion over 24 hours.

Patch: Opioids can be prescribed in a patch form (for further information see separate leaflet).

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of my regular opioid or I am sick? If you forget please take a dose as soon as you remember. If you are sick and this continues or your pain worsens, please contact your doctor or Palliative Care nurse for further advice.

Are there any side effects from opioids? **Drowsiness:** this should improve after a few days of taking these drugs or after a dose increase. Until this has settled, it is advisable not to drink alcohol and avoid driving or operating machinery.

Constipation: this affects most people taking opioids and the doctor or Palliative Care nurse will usually prescribe a laxative for you to take to prevent constipation becoming a problem. It is important for you to try to drink plenty of fluids.

Nausea or vomiting: some patients may experience nausea (and rarely vomiting). This should improve by itself after a few days, but if it becomes problematic your doctor or Palliative Care nurse will be able to prescribe you some anti-sickness medication.

Less common side effects: a small number of people may feel restless, experience nightmares or hallucinations. If you experience any of these, **DO NOT** stop the opioid before informing your healthcare professional.

Can I drink alcohol? Yes, you can drink a small amount of alcohol with opioids. However, you may feel more drowsy than usual.

Can I drive? Taking opioids doesn't mean you can't drive. It is recommended that you don't drive during the first few days of starting or increasing the dose, and then initially drive in daytime hours and for short distances. You should inform your insurance company that you have been prescribed opioids. It is your legal responsibility to carry documentation as evidence that this is a prescribed medication.