Safe Use and Disposal of Fentanyl Transdermal Patches

Information for patients
This leaflet will give you a better understanding of how to use fentanyl transdermal patches as a method of pain control. It will tell you how to apply, dispose of and store the fentanyl transdermal patches safely, in order to prevent harm to yourself and to others. It will also explain the common side effects to look out for.

About fentanyl transdermal patches

Fentanyl patches are applied to your skin and contain a strong painkiller called fentanyl. The medicine passes slowly through your skin into your body to help relieve severe, long term pain. Fentanyl patches are available in different strengths. Your doctor will prescribe you the correct strength that is suitable to you; this means they must not be handled or used by anyone other than yourself.

When you first start using fentanyl transdermal patches, or if your dose is increased, it can take up to 24 hours for the painkiller to start to work. Your doctor will give you extra painkillers to take if you need them, until your patch is working. If your pain is not well controlled when the patches start to work and you need to take more than 2-3 doses of extra painkiller a day, tell your doctor.
How to apply a fentanyl transdermal patch

• Always apply the fentanyl patch on a flat part of your upper body or arm.

• If your skin is very hairy, do not shave it as this can irritate the skin. Instead, trim the hair as close to your skin as possible before applying the patch.

• Make sure your skin is completely clean and dry before you put the patch on. Do not apply it straight after a hot bath or shower.

• If you need to clean your skin before you apply the patch, just use cold water. Do not use soap or any other cleansers, creams, moisturisers, oils or talcum powder on the area before applying the patch.

• Use each patch once only and never cut or divide the patch.

• Make sure that the patch will be covered by loose clothing and is not stuck under tight or elasticated areas of your clothes (such as bra straps, cuffs or waistbands).

• Carefully peel the plastic backing away from the patch, trying not to touch the sticky side of the patch. Keep the plastic pouch that the patch came in, to use when you change it for a new one.

• Press the sticky part of the patch onto your skin and hold it in place for at least 30 seconds, making sure it sticks well, especially at the edges.

• Do not apply patches in the same place twice in a row.

• Do not apply the patches over any cuts, spots or other skin blemishes.
How to dispose of a fentanyl transdermal patch after use

• As soon as you take a patch off, fold it firmly in half so that the sticky side sticks to itself.

• Put it back in its original pouch and put the pouch in the bin with your household rubbish, out of the sight and reach of children.

How to store your fentanyl transdermal patches

• Keep all patches, used and unused, out of the sight and reach of children.

• Regularly check that the patch is still stuck to your skin. If the patch falls off, dispose of it safely and apply a new patch, making a note of the new day, date and time when you will need to change it.

• If your patches are out of date or you are told by your doctor that you no longer need to use them, take them to your pharmacy where they can be disposed of safely.
Important points to remember

• The patch will last for 3 days – always make sure that you have removed your existing patch before applying a new one.

• If you are using more than one patch, change all your patches at the same time.

• Make a note of the day, date and time you apply the patch, to remind you when you need to change it.

• A patch could cause serious harm if it accidentally sticks to somebody else’s skin or is swallowed – if this happens seek medical help immediately.

• If you develop a fever while wearing a fentanyl transdermal patch this may affect the way the medicine passes through your skin. Remove the patch and tell your GP.

• Don’t expose the patch to direct heat, such as heating pads, electric blankets, hot water bottles, tanning lamps, intensive sun bathing, long hot baths, saunas or hot whirlpool spa baths. These may affect the way the medicine is absorbed through your skin.
Possible side effects of fentanyl transdermal patches

Fentanyl transdermal patches may make you unusually drowsy, muddled or confused and can slow down your breathing. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms take the patch off and seek medical help straight away.

Other possible side effects include:

- nausea and vomiting
- headaches and dizziness
- constipation
- skin irritation.

If you experience any of these symptoms or any other side effects, contact your GP. They will be able to advise you on how to relieve these symptoms or may be able to prescribe you with a different type of pain relief.

Further information

Always read the leaflet enclosed with your fentanyl transdermal patches before use.
If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221 473 or email PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk