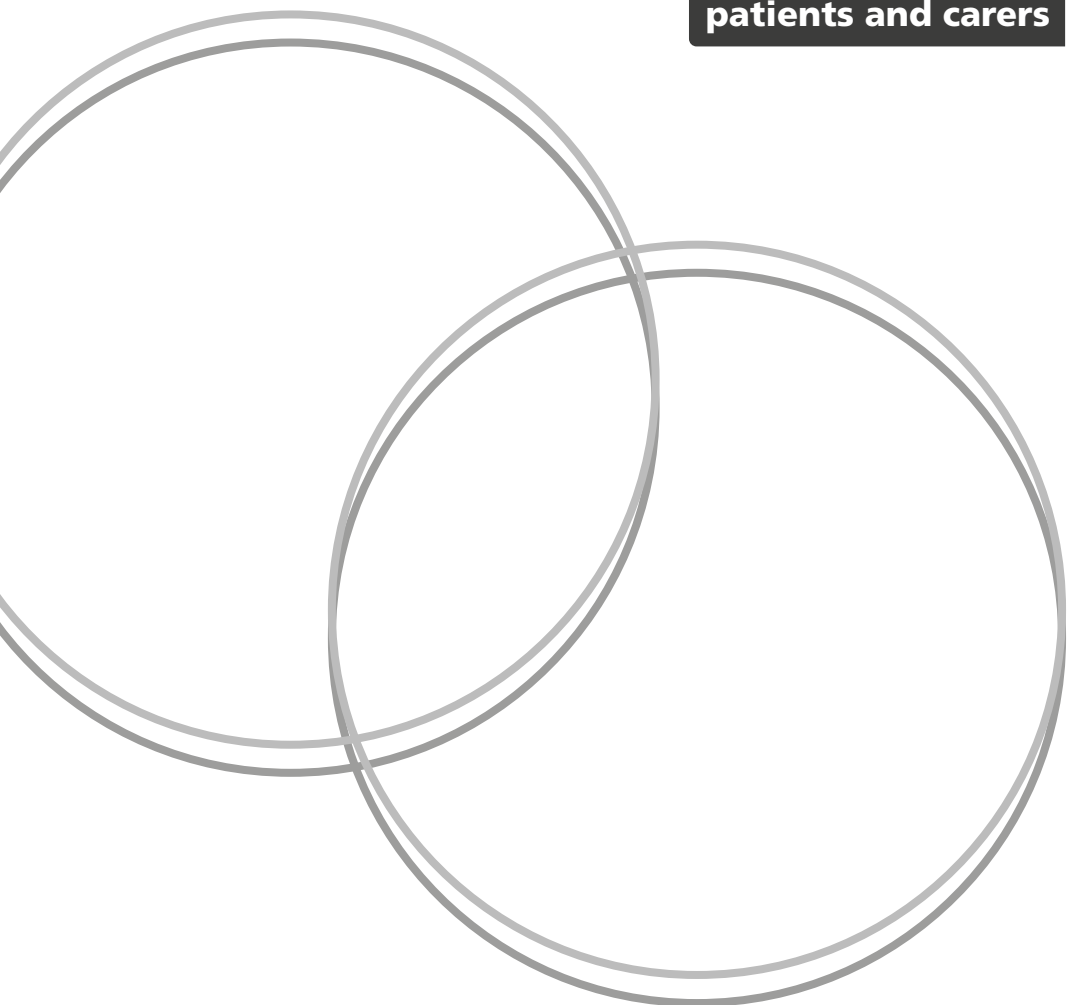


# Understanding pain medications following injury and surgery

**Information for  
patients and carers**





## In hospital

When you were in hospital, you were given different medications to help with your pain. This leaflet explains what these medications are and how to take them safely when you are at home.



## Leaving hospital

### **Will I be pain-free?**

No. Pain is part of the healing process. The pain medications should make the pain manageable so that you are able to do your day-to-day activities and exercises, but they will not take away your pain completely.

## **Let's talk about opioids**

After an injury or surgery, mild pain medicines such as paracetamol and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are used to manage pain. If these are not enough and pain is still severe, then stronger pain medicines called opioids can be added to manage short-term pain (acute pain).

Opioid medications such as codeine or tramadol (weak opioids), and morphine or oxycodone (strong opioids), are used to help acute pain after surgery or following an injury; or for patients with cancer being looked after by the palliative care team.

Opioid medications offer good pain relief in the short-term, but they are not recommended for long-term non-cancer pain.

### **Can I take other medications or alcohol?**

If you are taking opioids, do not take alcohol, sleeping pills or other sedating medications.

If you have any questions about your medications, you should seek medical advice.

### **Can I drive whilst taking opioid medications?**

You should not drive whilst taking opioid medications after surgery or trauma.

### **Do these medications have side effects?**

Some people may experience constipation, nausea, itching and dizziness with opioids. This can usually be easily managed with medication.

**If you or your friends or family members notice that you are becoming sleepy after taking opioids, or that you are not able to stay awake during the day, do not take any more and seek medical advice.**

## **What else can I do to help manage my pain?**

As well as pain medications, other things to help pain can include: movement (within recommendations from physiotherapy team), elevating limbs to help with swelling, distraction techniques, mindfulness, and relaxation techniques. Ice packs, heat pads or a TENS machine can also help, but should not be used on or near the wound.

Check with your health professional which might be suitable for you.

## **When and how do I stop taking pain medications following injury or surgery?**

*This does not apply for patients under the palliative care team.*

As you heal following the injury or surgery, your pain will reduce day by day, so you should only need to take these strong pain medicines for 1-2 weeks after going home.

It is important not to stop opioid pain medications suddenly, but you should reduce them down gradually. Stopping suddenly may cause symptoms of withdrawal such as: flu-like symptoms, sweating, irritability, anxiety, and muscle aches.

Contact your healthcare provider or GP for more advice on how to manage this.

# Safe use of opioids at home



## **Storage**

Store opioid medications securely out of sight and reach of children and pets.



## **Not sharing**

You must not share any prescribed medications with anyone else.



## **Disposal**

Any leftover medication should be returned to your local pharmacy for safe disposal as soon as possible.

# Notes



## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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