



## Your important health information

# Managing your pain after surgery

---

## Good pain control is important to keep you comfortable and improve your recovery.

Taking pain medicine correctly helps to effectively manage your pain.

You may be given more than one medicine to help control your pain. As these medicines relieve your pain in different ways, they are safe to be taken together and can be more effective in reducing your pain.

## There are three types of pain-relieving medicines:

### □ Paracetamol

For example, Panamax<sup>®</sup> or Panadol<sup>®</sup>.

Paracetamol is most effective for relieving mild pain, especially when taken regularly. Paracetamol can also be used to relieve more severe pain.

**Taking paracetamol regularly can help reduce the amount of stronger pain relieving medicines you may need. Do not take more than 8 tablets containing paracetamol in a 24 hour period.**

### □ Anti-inflammatories

For example, diclofenac (Voltaren<sup>®</sup>) or ibuprofen (Nurofen<sup>®</sup> and Rafen<sup>®</sup>).

Anti-inflammatories help reduce pain, especially when you have inflammation (swelling). Because anti-inflammatories can irritate the stomach they should be taken with food. Anti-inflammatories should not be taken for more than one week unless advised to by your doctor.

Stop taking anti-inflammatories if you become dehydrated, have reflux or heartburn. Do not take anti-inflammatories if you have (or have had) a gastric ulcer, poor kidney function. Use anti-inflammatories carefully if you have asthma.

### □ Opioids

For example, oxycodone (Endone<sup>®</sup>, OxyNorm<sup>®</sup>), tapentadol (Palexia IR<sup>®</sup>, Palexia SR<sup>®</sup>), tramadol (APO-Tramadol<sup>®</sup>) or codeine.

Opioids are strong pain relievers and come in two forms:

- immediate-release (Endone<sup>®</sup>, OxyNorm<sup>®</sup>, APO-Tramadol<sup>®</sup>, Palexia IR<sup>®</sup>) providing quick, short-term pain control
- slow-release (Targin<sup>®</sup>, Oxycontin<sup>®</sup>, Palexia SR<sup>®</sup>) providing pain control lasting up to 12 hours.

## Starting a new medicine

- When starting a new medicine, tell your doctor or pharmacist what medicines you are already taking, as these can interact with your pain relieving medicines.
- Medicines can include prescriptions, herbal supplements and medicines bought over the counter.
- You can find instructions on how many tablets you need to take and how often to take them on the medicine label.
- Taking more than the recommended dose of any medicine can be harmful or fatal.
- Paracetamol, anti-inflammatories and opioids can be taken together to help reduce severe pain.
- Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you have any questions about your medicines.

## When to take your pain medicines

- Taking paracetamol and anti-inflammatory medicines regularly can help to manage your pain. This can also help reduce the amount of opioid medicine you may need.
- If you have been prescribed a slow-release opioid you may also need to take this regularly for the first few days.
- Immediate-release opioids should only be used if you are still in pain while taking your other regular pain relievers.
- Do not wait for your pain to become severe before taking pain relieving medicines.
- Strong pain relievers, such as opioids, work best when taken in combination with paracetamol and/or anti-inflammatory medicines.
- If you know an activity will increase your pain, such as showering or exercise, take your pain medicine 30 minutes to one hour before the activity to reduce the severity of the pain.

## How to stop taking pain medicines

To stop taking pain medicines, it is important that you use a step-wise approach. This is to make sure your pain stays well-controlled.

1. First, reduce how often you take any slow-release opioid medicines. If your pain continues to be well controlled, you can stop this medicine.
2. Next, reduce how often you take any immediate-release opioid medicines and then stop.
3. If your pain is still well controlled, reduce how often you take any anti-inflammatory medicines. For example, from three times a day, to twice a day, to once a day and then stop.
4. When you are no longer taking any anti-inflammatory medicines reduce how often you take paracetamol, or take it only when needed rather than regularly.

## What to do if your pain is not controlled at home

If you require extra medicine or if you are finding it difficult to manage your pain at home, visit your general practitioner (GP).

If you have increasing or severe pain that is not responding to your pain medicine, you should visit your GP or the closest emergency department.

General questions about your medicines can be answered by your hospital or local pharmacist.

## Possible side effects

All medicines can cause side effects. Everyone will respond differently. Most side effects are mild, predictable and easily managed.

Not all pain medicines are suitable for everyone. If you have any concerns or you are worried about side effects, please check with your doctor, pharmacist or GP.

Common side effects when taking an opioid medicine include: drowsiness, constipation, nausea or vomiting, dry mouth and dizziness.

Drinking alcohol while affected by an opioid medicine can increase the side effects of the medicine.

## Drowsiness

Opioid medicines can make you drowsy and slow your reaction time. Wait and see how the medicine affects you before attempting tasks such as driving.

If you have just given birth, take extra care when carrying or handling your baby.

## Nausea or vomiting

Pain medicines can sometimes make you feel sick or nauseous. Taking medicine with food and plenty of water can help reduce this feeling.

Your doctor can also prescribe medicines to treat severe nausea.

## Constipation

Some pain-relieving medicines can cause constipation. Staying active, drinking water and having fibre in your diet can help minimise constipation.

Your doctor may also prescribe laxatives while you are taking an opioid medicine. It is best to take a laxative regularly to stop becoming constipated, rather than taking a laxative when you are constipated.

If you are concerned about becoming constipated speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

You can purchase these laxatives without a prescription from your local pharmacy:

- Lactulose
- Coloxyl and Senna®
- Coloxyl®
- Movicol®.

## Please remember

- You cannot become addicted to paracetamol or anti-inflammatory medications.
- Addiction to opioid medicines is unlikely when used for short-term management of pain.
- If you are using opioid medicines for longer than two weeks, speak to your doctor or pharmacist as you may need to reduce your dose slowly rather than suddenly stopping.
- If you have any further questions or if there is something you do not understand, please ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

### Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact:

#### Pharmacy Department

#### Mercy Hospital for Women

Phone: 03 8458 4666

#### Werribee Mercy Hospital

Phone: 03 8754 3541

### Acknowledgements

Produced by: Pharmacy MHVL

Date produced: June 2018

Date of last review: September 2022

Date for review: September 2024

This document provides general information only and is not intended to replace advice about your health from a qualified practitioner. If you are concerned about your health, you should seek advice from a qualified practitioner.