

Pharmacy

Opioids for the management of cancer pain

Information for patients and carers

This leaflet provides information on medicines called opioids which are used for the management of moderate to severe pain due to cancer or its associated treatments.

This leaflet should be used together with the manufacturer's patient information leaflet supplied with your medication.

What are opioid medicines?

- Opioids are a group of strong pain medicines such as morphine, oxycodone, buprenorphine and fentanyl amongst others.
- There are many different types and strengths of opioids available. These will be discussed with you by your clinical team when prescribing.
- Opioids can improve your pain and support you to maintain or improve your ability to carry out daily activities, they may not remove your pain completely.

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham, Salford or Macclesfield. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week



How to take your opioid medicines safely

- Your clinical team will explain how to take your medication and can answer any questions you may have. You may be asked to keep a pain diary, to help us understand your pain better.
- **DO NOT** suddenly stop taking your opioid medication without speaking to your clinical team.
- If your pain becomes worse, please contact your clinical team or GP. If your pain is severe, or you feel unwell, contact The Christie Hotline **0161 446 3658** (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week).
- Opioids should be taken for the shortest amount of time needed to support your treatment journey, however, some patients may need opioids long term. Long-term opioids should be reviewed regularly by your clinical team and the dose reduced or stopped if/when your pain allows. This may be done by your oncology team, GP or specialist pain/symptom control team.

How to manage your pain

Working together with your clinical team to discuss your symptoms and any concerns you may have will help get the best result for you.

Continue to take your medication as prescribed and report any side effects promptly. In addition:

- opioid medicines work well when taken with paracetamol
- some patients will also be prescribed other pain medicines which work together with opioids for different types of pain, your clinical team will advise you the safest way to do so
- there are non-medication options to help manage your pain which may work for some people. Examples include visualisation, relaxation and breathing exercises, massage, acupuncture, light exercise, music therapy and psychological support. These can help to promote relaxation and distract from the pain

Opioid safety at home

- Never share your medicines with other people.
- Keep your medicines locked away and out of reach of pets and children.
- Opioids can affect your ability to drive. Do not drive unless you are safe to. For further information, visit the website www.gov.uk and search 'DVLA drugs and driving: the law'.
- If you have left over opioids at home, please take them to a pharmacy for destruction.

What side-effects could I experience?

As with all medicines, opioids can have side effects which may include:

- constipation, dry mouth, nausea/vomiting, drowsiness, confusion, hallucinations and can rarely affect your breathing
- tolerance, dependence, and withdrawal effects are possible however, very few patients taking opioids appropriately for pain relief become dependent on them
- some side effects can be made worse by alcohol

If you are concerned about any of these side effects, please contact your clinical team.

Further information

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk

Search 'cancer pain management without drugs' and 'pain'.

Cancer Research UK

www.cancerresearchuk.org

Search 'cancer and pain'.

Maggie's Centre

www.maggies.org

Search 'pain and cancer'.