

Supportive care

Alfentanil injection

What is alfentanil?

Alfentanil is a strong painkiller which is in the group of painkillers called opioids. It is often used when pain has not responded to other opioids (like morphine) or where other opioid painkillers cause side effects. Alfentanil can be of particular use in the management of pain where a person has liver or kidney problems that limit the use of other painkillers.

The possible benefits of treatment vary; your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment. This leaflet should be read in conjunction with the manufacturer's patient information leaflet.

How is alfentanil given?

Alfentanil is a short-acting drug and it is possible to give in multiple daily doses by injection under the skin, when required. It can also be administered in a portable battery operated pump (syringe driver) as an infusion given over 24 hours to give continuous pain relief.

Alfentanil may be given alone in a syringe pump, or in combination with other medicines. A district nurse will attend your home daily to administer your medication, and this will be arranged for you before you leave the hospital.

What dose of alfentanil is usually prescribed?

The dose of alfentanil prescribed varies greatly from person to person. It is generally started in the hospital setting by the palliative/supportive care team. Once symptoms are controlled, you can go home with alfentanil provided the district nurses or community Macmillan nurses and GP are happy to oversee this at home. Some patients may require a specialist review on an ongoing basis as alfentanil is a medication that is not used very frequently in the community setting.

How long will I have to stay in hospital?

This is very variable as the dose may need to be adjusted until your pain is controlled.

What are the possible risks/side-effects?

Tiredness or sleepiness may occur, however this often settles shortly after starting alfentanil. Other side effects may include sickness, constipation and confusion. Alfentanil can also cause low blood pressure. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will be able to advise you further about these. As with all opioids, in overdose alfentanil can cause a slow breathing pattern. The dose will be adjusted carefully for your needs so it is correct for you.



Can I take alfentanil with my other medications?

All of your medications will be reviewed when you are started on alfentanil. The alfentanil replaces any strong opioid painkillers that you are prescribed (e.g. morphine or oxycodone) although some people will continue to have these prescribed as needed. Other painkillers, for example ibuprofen or paracetamol can be taken at the same time if these are suitable for you.

Alfentanil may interact with some medications, including certain antifungal drugs such as fluconazole, and the antibiotics clarithromycin and erythromycin. You should also avoid grapefruit juice whilst you are prescribed this medicine.

Use of alfentanil and sedative medicines such as benzodiazepines or related drugs increases the risk of drowsiness, difficulties in breathing (respiratory depression). If you are taking any sedative medicines, you will be carefully monitored for side-effects.

If you have any queries or concerns about alfentanil and other medicines you are taking, you can discuss with your doctor, specialist nurse or pharmacist. Further information is available in the manufacturer's patient information leaflet which is supplied with the medication.

Is alfentanil addictive?

It is very rare for someone who is taking alfentanil for pain relief to become addicted. If you have any concerns, you can talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What is the length of treatment and plan for follow-up?

The length of treatment will depend on your symptoms. You will be regularly reviewed to assess whether your alfentanil dose needs to be altered. Before you are discharged we will agree who will review your pain after discharge; this will be either be The Christie supportive care team or a local service if this is available. You can continue to take alfentanil for as long as it helps your pain or is assessed to be suitable for you.

Do I need to have any special monitoring or tests when taking alfentanil?

Your kidneys and liver function will be monitored, and your blood pressure should be checked when you start treatment or receive a dose increase to check it isn't too low. If you are receiving alfentanil via a syringe pump, your skin will be checked on a regular basis by the nursing staff to check for signs of skin irritation.

If your GP or local palliative care team take over alfentanil prescribing in the community, they will discuss any further monitoring requirements with you.

Can I drive if I am taking alfentanil?

Alfentanil may impair your mental and/or physical ability to perform potentially hazardous tasks such as driving or operating machinery. It may be an offence to drive if your ability to drive safely is affected by taking this medicine. You should not drive after starting alfentanil or after a dose change until you have had a discussion with your doctor regarding whether this is advisable and safe.

Who will initiate alfentanil and issue further prescriptions?

This will be agreed between the supportive care team and your GP before you are discharged. You will be given a sufficient supply of alfentanil on discharge to allow your GP time to review you and issue a further prescription if you are to continue treatment.

How to get further prescriptions for alfentanil?

Alfentanil is a specialist medicine in palliative care and is not readily available from your community pharmacy; who require advance notice to order. You will also require a supply of water for injection, which is used to dilute the alfentanil and any other medicines you may be receiving by the syringe pump.

If your GP is willing to prescribe alfentanil, **please don't leave it too late to request a prescription**. You should request a prescription at least 72 hours in advance of you running out of medication to give your GP and community pharmacist time to arrange. Please allow extra time at weekends and bank holidays.

If you are attending The Christie supportive care or pain clinic for follow-up, alfentanil may be dispensed by The Christie Pharmacy. You should be given sufficient supply to last you until your next review.

If you run out of alfentanil injection and are unable to get a further supply, you must contact the supportive care team for advice.

How should alfentanil be stored?

Alfentanil injection should be stored in a cool dry place **out of the reach of children and pets**. Any unused medication can be returned to any pharmacy for safe disposal.

Who should I phone if I need advice urgently about alfentanil?

Monday to Friday, 9:00am - 5:00pm contact the supportive care team on **0161 446 3559**, or **0161 446 8493**.

During the evening or at weekends and bank holidays, if you have any queries, contact The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658**.

Useful contacts:

- Secretary: supportive care team **0161 446 3559**
- Secretary: pain team **0161 446 8493**
- Supportive care pharmacist **0161 446 3443**
- The Christie Pharmacy **0161 446 3432/3433**

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