

PHARMACY

Drug Information

Opioids for Pain Management



What is Opioids?

- Opioids are a class of drugs that are commonly prescribed to relieve moderate to severe pain and/or breathlessness.
- Opioids may be produced naturally from opium or made synthetically.
- Opioids are available in various formulations and may be administered in various ways. It is important to understand your medications and take them correctly as instructed by healthcare professionals.
- Medications in this medicine class include:
 - Oral forms:
 - Codeine tablets
 - Tramadol capsules/tablets
 - Morphine syrup
 - Morphine sustained released tablets (do not crush!)
 - Oxycodone capsules (Oxynorm®)
 - Oxycodone slow release tablets (Oxycontin Neo®) (do not crush!)
 - Oxycodone/Naloxone prolonged release tablets (Targin®) (do not crush!)
 - Methadone tablets
 - Injection forms (via subcutaneous or intravenous route):
 - Morphine injection
 - Fentanyl injection
 - Topical forms (available as thin films or sheets, to be applied onto surface of skin):
 - Fentanyl patch
 - Buprenorphine patch

How is Opioids Administered / Taken?

- The amount of opioids required to control pain and/or breathlessness varies among individuals.
- Your doctor will adjust the dose until the most suitable amount to keep your pain and/or breathlessness under control is reached.
- In some occasions, your doctor may switch to another type of opioid that best suits your condition.
- Regular doses of opioids are used to control pain and/or breathlessness which are persistent and constant. These are taken “round-the-clock” to prevent the symptoms from recurring.
- Additional doses (known as “breakthrough”) or other opioids may be prescribed to address the pain and/or breathlessness which are still experienced despite taking regular opioid dose.
- Oral opioids are usually taken after meals.
- Parenteral administration of opioids is usually performed by trained healthcare professionals.
- If you miss a dose, take the missed dose as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose, take only the usual dose. Do not double the dosage.

Can Opioids be Administered / Taken With Other Medications?

- Please inform your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking other medications, including supplements, traditional or herbal remedies.

What are the Important Side Effects of Opioids?

- Like all other medicines, opioids has side effects. Some of these side effects may get better over time while others last longer. You can also speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist on ways to manage these side effects. Below are commonly reported side effects.

Side Effect	Management
Constipation	You may be prescribed laxatives to be taken together with opioids, to prevent constipation. It is important that you take your laxatives regularly to prevent this condition, which might otherwise be hard to reverse. If you find that you have trouble passing stools despite regular intake of laxatives, please inform your doctor or pharmacist.
Drowsiness	Do not drive or operate dangerous machinery. Drowsiness can be transient and last for few days. If you experience persistent or excessive drowsiness, please inform your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.
Nausea, vomiting	Take oral opioids after meals. Nausea and vomiting usually improves after a few days. If you are troubled by this side effect, your doctor may prescribe some medicine for you.

If you develop rashes, facial swelling or shortness of breath after taking the medication, you could be allergic to the medication. Please seek medical attention immediately.

Are There any Special Precautions That I Need to Take?

- It is important to inform your doctor if you intend to conceive or breastfeed while taking this medication.
- Never share your medicine with others. Opioids are strong pain-killers and should only be used under medical supervision.

How do I Store Opioids?

- Store your medication in a cool, dry place away from heat, moisture and direct sunlight.

How Do I Dispose Unused / Expired Opioids Properly?

- Do not discard unwanted opioids with household trash or flush them down the toilet. You should return any unwanted (unused/leftover/expired) medications back to pharmacy and they will help you to dispose them safely. Make sure that the medications are labelled with the following:
 - Name and NRIC of the patient (if known)
 - Name and strength of the opioid(s)
 - Reason for disposal

If you have any problem with your treatment, please contact your doctor, pharmacist or nurse clinician.

Please keep all medications out of reach of children.

