

How should I take my strong opioids?

Name of medicine:

How to take it:

Name of medicine:

How to take it:

Your notes:



24-hour advice line

Patients, carers and healthcare professionals can get advice around the clock on
0800 970 7970 (Stockport area) and
0808 144 2860 (Manchester, Salford and Trafford areas)

Textphone users please prefix any of the numbers below with 18001

St Ann's Hospice, Heald Green

(Administration centre)
St Ann's Road North, Heald Green,
Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 3SZ
Telephone: 0161 437 8136

St Ann's Hospice, Little Hulton

Meadowsweet Lane (off Peel Lane),
Little Hulton, Worsley,
Manchester M28 0FE
Telephone: 0161 702 8181

Neil Cliffe Centre

Wythenshawe Hospital,
Southmoor Road, Wythenshawe,
Manchester M23 9LT
Telephone: 0161 291 2912

Please note, St Ann's operates a no smoking policy across all our sites.

Key telephone numbers

Day Therapy, Heald Green -
0161 498 3612

Day Therapy, Little Hulton -
0161 702 5416

Charity shops FREEPHONE
0800 612 4679

Fundraising/Donations - 0161 498 3631

Lottery - 0161 498 3642

Volunteering - 0161 498 3653

Get more information

We have a wide range of information leaflets, available both in print and to download from our website. To get your copies, either go to our website or call one of the main hospice telephone numbers.

Comments and feedback

We welcome your feedback: go online at www.sah.org.uk/feedback, talk to a member of staff or fill in a comments card (found near the red posting boxes around our sites). Formal complaints can be made in writing to our Chief Executive at our Heald Green address.

Find out more about us

You can find out more about St Ann's Hospice on our website, or by emailing us:
website: www.sah.org.uk **email:** enquiries@sah.org.uk



What are strong opioids?

Strong opioids are medicines that are commonly used to relieve pain when medicines haven't fully helped. They can also be used to relieve breathlessness or cough. Common examples of strong opioids are: buprenorphine, diamorphine, fentanyl, morphine and oxycodone, although you may know them by their brand name.

How effective are strong opioids?

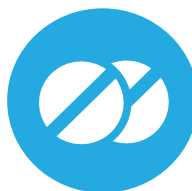
Strong opioids can work well for treating pain or breathlessness, however everyone is different in how they respond. Doses may need to be changed to manage pain and side effects. This should always be discussed with your doctor. Sometimes other types of medicines are needed, such as medicines used for nerve pain.

Background pain

Often people are prescribed 'modified release' or 'slow release' strong opioids in the form capsules, tablets or patches. These medicines are used to treat constant pain, which is often called "background pain".

Breakthrough pain

Sometimes, you may experience pain before your next dose of regular opioid is due. This is commonly known as "breakthrough pain." You may be prescribed a faster acting strong opioid medicine to treat this pain, known as an "immediate release", "top-up" or "rescue" medicine. You can take this medicine if your pain suddenly gets worse or you need something extra to treat your pain. It's helpful to make a note of how many "breakthrough" doses you need to take so that your doctor can adjust the dose of your regular strong opioid to make it more effective.



What are the common side effects of strong opioids?

- Constipation – this affects nearly everyone taking strong opioids and you should usually be prescribed a laxative, which you take regularly.
- Drowsiness - you may feel a little bit drowsy or find it hard to concentrate when you first start taking strong opioids or if your dose is increased, but this usually improves over time. This may affect your ability to drive or operate machinery so it's advisable to wait until it settles before doing these activities.
- Sickness - feeling sick or nauseous is common when starting strong opioids or when the dose is increased. This often improves after a few days, and you may be prescribed anti-sickness medicines to help.
- Other side effects - if you experience any side effects that don't improve over time ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice. Do not stop taking your strong opioid medicine abruptly.

Common concerns

Will I become addicted to strong opioids?

This is extremely unlikely when they're used to treat pain or breathlessness.

If I use strong opioids now, will they work in the future?

The side effects of strong opioids often reduce over time but the effectiveness does not. If pain or breathlessness gets worse the dosage can be changed.

Does taking a strong opioid mean I am coming to the end of my life?

No - these medications are used at different stages in many different conditions.

What do I do if I miss a dose of modified release strong opioid?

Do not take two doses together. Use a fast acting (immediate release) strong opioid to treat any pain or breathlessness that occurs before the next dose regular dose is due, then take the next regular dose at the usual time.

Can I drink alcohol whilst taking strong opioids?

This may increase drowsiness and affect concentration, particularly when a new opioid medication is started or the dose is increased. When you're taking a stable dose you should be able to drink alcohol in moderation, although you may feel its effects more than usual.

Can I drive whilst taking strong opioids?

You should discuss this with your doctor. You must not drive until you know how your opioid medicine affects you (especially just after starting or changing the dose of a medicine) and you must not drive or operate machinery if you feel drowsy or unsafe to do so for any reason.

Once you are on a stable regular dose of a "modified release" strong opioid you may be able to continue to drive as long as you don't experience any side effects which could impair your driving ability. In 2015 there were changes to the law on driving whilst taking medicines including opioids. It may be helpful to carry evidence that the opioid you are taking has been prescribed for you.

You must inform the DVLA and your insurance company of any condition or medication that could affect your ability to drive safely. For more information on this, visit: www.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions

How should strong opioids be stored?

You should store them in their original packaging in a cool, dry place out of the reach of children.

How should I dispose of unwanted strong opioids?

If possible you should return them to the pharmacy that dispensed them. If that's not possible, return them to an alternative pharmacy. Do not flush them down the toilet or put them in the bin.

When should I seek advice from a health professional?

You should contact your doctor or nurse if you experience any of the following:

- If your pain gets worse and isn't relieved by your current medicine
- If you become more sleepy or drowsy than usual
- If you are being sick for more than 24 hours
- If you feel confused
- If you experience hallucinations or bad dreams
- If you develop breathing difficulties or become very drowsy while taking opioids you should seek urgent medical advice.