

Pain management after surgery

May 2024

This factsheet is available to help you understand:

- Different types of medication that you may be asked to take to help manage your pain after surgery
- Which pain relief medicine you may have been given to take home
- How to take those medications and their common side effects

Everybody's experience of pain is different. The medication you are advised to take will be considered according to:

- The type of surgery you had (i.e., laparoscopy or laparotomy)
- The amount of pain you are experiencing
- Whether or not you are taking other medications

Whilst taking the pain relief medications described in this leaflet, you should not take any other pain medication unless discussed with your care provider.

There are three common types of pain-relieving medications:

- Simple pain relief, e.g., paracetamol
- Anti-inflammatories, e.g., ibuprofen, diclofenac
- Opioids, e.g., tramadol, oxycodone

These common types of medications are sometimes used on their own or sometimes used together. When used together, at low doses, they can provide better pain relief and reduce the likelihood and severity of side effects. Pain medications are usually given as a regular dose with additional medicine when required, (known as "breakthrough pain").

AFTER LEAVING HOSPITAL

You will be given advice regarding your specific post-operative pain requirements, however, you should:

Take paracetamol and/or anti-inflammatory medications on a regular basis and only take opioids for "breakthrough pain". ALL these pain medications should be gradually reduced over a period of one to two weeks.

If you experience severe or unusual pain after you leave the hospital you should contact your care provider / emergency immediately.

- A tick in the box indicates a medicine you have been asked to take

SIMPLE PAIN RELIEF

- Paracetamol** (common brand names: Panadol or Panamax) is a mild pain relief medication and is well tolerated with few side effects.

The recommended dose is 1g (i.e. two 500mg tablets or caplets) every six hours (four times a day). Do not take more than 8 tablets (= 4g paracetamol) in 24 hours.

While taking regular paracetamol, you should not take any other medicine (e.g., over-the-counter medicine) containing paracetamol, e.g. cold and flu tablets, or other brands of paracetamol.

ANTI-INFLAMMATORY MEDICATION

Anti-inflammatory medications help to reduce pain due to inflammation and swelling. You can take either diclofenac or ibuprofen, but not both at the same time. Although usually well-tolerated, they can cause indigestion, heartburn, reflux, diarrhoea, or abdominal pain in some patients. In a small number of patients with asthma, they can increase wheeziness. Where possible, these medicines should be taken with or soon after food.

- ❑ **Diclofenac** (common brand name: Voltaren) is a strong anti-inflammatory.

The recommended dose is 50mg (one tablet) every eight hours (three times a day).

- ❑ **Ibuprofen** (common brand names: Nurofen, Advil or Brufen) is another anti-inflammatory used as an alternative to diclofenac. It is slightly less potent, but milder on the stomach.

The recommended dose is 200mg-400mg (one-two tablets) every eight hours (three times a day).

OPIOIDS

Opioids are stronger pain-relieving medications used for moderate to severe pain. You are advised to take them when pain is not controlled with other medications. Common side effects which may occur include dizziness, nausea and vomiting, confusion, constipation and drowsiness. Due to the sedating effect, it is not advisable to drink alcohol or drive a vehicle while taking any of these medications. Laxatives may be required if you experience constipation.

- ❑ **Tramadol** (common brand names: Zydol, Tramedo, Tramal) is a moderate to strong pain medication.

The recommended dose is 50-100mg (one-two tablets) up to four times a day when required for moderate to severe pain.

- ❑ **Tapentadol** (common brand names: Palexia) is a moderate to strong pain medication.

The recommended dose is 50-100mg (one-two tablets) up to four times a day when required for moderate to severe pain.

- ❑ **Oxycodone** (common brand names: Endone or OxyNorm) is a strong pain medication similar to morphine. Side effects are more common with this medication, and therefore you should take it only for short periods, as required, for breakthrough pain. If it is used for relief of breakthrough pain, regular pain medicine should be continued, and oxycodone added to 'top-up' your pain relief when required.

The recommended dose is 5-10mg (one-two tablets or capsules) up to four times a day when required for severe pain.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

If you require any further information, you can speak to your specialist, local doctor, local community pharmacist or hospital pharmacist.