

### What is an opioid?

An opioid is a medicine that acts on the nervous system to reduce pain—it will not take the pain away completely.

Opioids should only be used short-term while your body heals. Do not use opioids long-term because they can cause significant adverse effects and can be addictive.

### How to take your opioid

Your doctor has prescribed an opioid for you to take if required. Only take the opioid if you have pain. Do not take your opioid more frequently than your doctor has prescribed.

Always make sure you have taken your other prescribed pain relief medicines (eg paracetamol, an anti-inflammatory drug).

If your pain is not well-controlled, you might need to change the dose slightly—your doctor will tell you how to do this safely. If your pain is not well-controlled despite adjusting the dose according to your doctor's instructions, seek medical advice.

As your body heals, reduce the frequency or dose of the opioid until you can stop it completely. Continue taking your other prescribed pain relief medicines (eg paracetamol, an anti-inflammatory drug) until your doctor tells you to stop.

### Things to watch out for while you are taking an opioid

**Sleepiness**—if you become very sleepy or are struggling to stay awake, immediately seek medical attention. Do not take any more opioid doses, even if you still have pain.

Because opioids can make you sleepy:

- avoid driving or operating machinery
- avoid taking other medicines or substances that can make you sleepy (eg alcohol, sleeping tablets, cannabis).

Children who are taking an opioid must be supervised, especially when they are restrained in a car seat, or in a bath.

**Safe storage and disposal**—store your opioid in a safe place, out of reach of children. Never share your opioid with anyone else. If your opioid is ingested by someone else, seek emergency medical care. Take any leftover opioids to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

### Adverse effects

Adverse effects caused by opioids are common, but can usually be managed effectively. Keep up your fluid and fibre intake to help prevent constipation; your doctor or pharmacist might recommend a laxative. Contact your doctor if you develop nausea, vomiting or a rash.