

Opiate Painkillers

Key information

What are opiate painkillers?

Opiate painkillers include medicines such as codeine, co-codamol, dihydrocodeine, tramadol, oxycodone, morphine, fentanyl and buprenorphine.

Why have I been given this information?

Your doctor or nurse has given you this leaflet because they have prescribed an opiate medicine for you. Before you take this medicine it is important you understand more about it.

What do I need to know about pain and opiates?

Doctors have prescribed opiates for many years to control pain. They can be very effective when used **short term for some types of pain**. They are not effective for all types of pain.

More recently scientists have discovered that opiates may not be suitable to prescribe for long periods of time, because over time they can do more harm than good.

For these reasons, national guidelines have suggested changes to the way doctors prescribe these medications for many painful conditions.

What problems can opiates cause?

When prescribed **short term** for the right sort of pain, opiates can be very safe and effective. When prescribed for the wrong sort of pain, for the wrong reasons or for a long time, opiates can cause problems.

Patients who use long-term opiates can develop:

- ♦ tolerance, dependence and addiction
- ♦ fatigue and tiredness
- ♦ sleep, concentration and mood disturbances
- ♦ sexual dysfunction
- ♦ heart problems
- ♦ constipation and other bowel problems
- ♦ breathing problems
- ♦ a reduced ability to fight infections
- ♦ problems with how the brain and nerves function
- ♦ problems with hormones
- ♦ a higher chance of overdose and death

In order to help you manage your pain safely and effectively, and to reduce harm from opiate medications, we are now working to the following guidelines.

- Strong opiates are powerful medications and won't be used as a "general purpose" painkiller.
- Strong opiates will be restricted to short term use.
- You will need a review with a clinician if you feel you need another prescription.
- We won't be able to replace lost medication – it is your responsibility to look after your medicines.
- Patients who do use opiates regularly will not be issued medication before the next prescription is due.

If you feel you may have become dependent on, or addicted to your painkillers, you get help locally by calling Recovery Steps on 01422 415550 or speak to your GP Practice:

Todmorden Group Practice
Lower George Street
Todmorden
West Yorkshire
OL14 5RN

(t) 01706 811100