

What else can I do?

- ◆ Pain medicines work best if you combine them with other ways of managing symptoms such as gentle exercise, using relaxation techniques, getting involved in social activities.
- ◆ Setting goals to help improve your life is an important way to see if your medicines are helping. Try to set small achievable goals which may have a positive impact on your life or improve your overall health.
- ◆ A pain management programme can make a huge difference to how well you manage the physical and emotional impact of living with persistent pain and help you get on with your life.

Where can I get help?

If you would like to discuss any information contained in this information leaflet, please speak to your doctor or pharmacist.



Where can I get more information?

For more support and information, please see the following websites:

<https://blackpoolsmile.org> – Blackpool Smile Chronic Pain Support Group

[Faye's story \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk)

[Faye's Story – in a video format, as told by her parents](#)

[PAINKILLERS DON'T EXIST \(painkillersdontexist.com\)](https://painkillersdontexist.com)

[Flippin' Pain \(flippinpain.co.uk\)](https://flippinpain.co.uk)

[For Patients and Relatives | Faculty of Pain Medicine \(fpm.ac.uk\)](https://fpm.ac.uk)

[Live Well With Pain](#)

[People living with Pain | British Pain Society](#)

[Ways to manage chronic pain - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

[How to get NHS help for your pain - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

[Pain Concern | Bringing the pain community together](#)



Opioid medication for long-term conditions

Patient information leaflet

What are opioids?

Opioids are morphine or morphine-like medicines used for the management of pain. Examples include **codeine and dihydrocodeine**, which are weaker opioids, often prescribed in combination with paracetamol (co-codamol and co-dydramol), and **tramadol, morphine** (Zomorph®) and **oxycodone** (Longtec®), which are strong opioids.

What are opioids used for?

Opioids are **not** effective for all types of pain. They are commonly used to manage the pain after severe injury, surgery, or cancer.

Studies suggest that risks to your health increase if you take opioids at high doses for a long period of time. Side effects and risks need to be balanced against any benefits. **If you've been using opioids for a long time, you and your doctor may want to review the benefits and the risks of these medicines for your condition.**

Should I take opioids long term?

When opioids are used to treat chronic pain, the initial benefit may not be the same over time. For many patients, opioids provide little to no pain relief taken long-term, and can lead to an overall reduction of the quality of life.



What are the Risks?

Long term use of opioids can lead to the **development of various health complaints:**

◆ **Respiratory depression** – opioids can cause a severe and potentially life-threatening reduction of the breathing rate. This risk increases substantially at higher doses or when the opioids are used **in combination** with certain drugs such as pregabalin, gabapentin, amitriptyline, diazepam, sleep medication, alcohol, some OTC medicines etc.

Always check the leaflet or speak to your pharmacist about the potential side-effects and interactions with your opioid medication when purchasing medicines in the pharmacy.

◆ **Hormonal changes** – fertility issues, low sex drive, erectile dysfunction, and irregular periods.

◆ **Increased levels of pain (hyperalgesia)** – opioid medication may make you more sensitive to pain and it can lead to an increase in the 'all-over' pain.

◆ **Reduced ability to fight infection** – your immune system may not work as well as it should.

◆ **Affected Cognitive and psychological functions** – opioids can affect the cognitive brain functions and lead to confusion, drowsiness, memory loss, and reduced ability to learn. They can make you feel tired, depressed, or anxious.

◆ **Tolerance** – this is the need for increased doses to maintain the same pain relief.

If tolerance becomes a significant problem this may mean that the prescribed opioid will need to be gradually withdrawn.

◆ **Addiction** – you are at risk of addiction even if you are using your opioid medication responsibly. Your risk of becoming addicted to opiates can increase if you use tobacco, alcohol, other addictive substances, and/or have a family history of addiction.

Should I have regular reviews of my opioid medication?

◆ To make sure that the opioids you are prescribed are still the best option, they should be reviewed at regular intervals. This may include reducing your dose every so often to make sure they are still working for you.

Harms outweigh the benefit at morphine equivalent doses of 120mg daily and an immediate reduction plan should be discussed with your prescriber if you need high doses long-term.

◆ Taking medicines is only one part of effective pain management.

◆ Chronic pain is difficult to treat. You and your doctor can agree to a treatment plan in which the symptoms are managed sufficiently without a negative impact on your physical, social, and emotional functioning.

◆ Complete relief of pain is rarely achieved with opioids.

◆ Many people find they can reduce their opioid dose without increasing their pain.