



A3 Usefulness of Medication

Medications for Persistent Pain

Medication can be used as part of pain management. Sadly, pain medication alone is not usually very helpful if it is the “only tool in the box” for managing your pain.

It is helpful to review your medication regularly with your GP, pharmacist or pain specialist. Regular reviews will ensure that you are getting the best from your medication and minimising long terms risks, side effects and harm.

Have a look at what you are taking for pain and fill out the chart

Name of medication. What type of medication is this?	How much does this reduce my pain? 0= not at all 10= complete pain relief	Side effects and problems

If you are taking warfarin you may need to monitor your INR if you start or stop paracetamol. Occasional doses of paracetamol should not cause any problems



The aims of reviewing your medication are:

1. Ensuring your medication is reducing your pain to a level where you can remain active each day.
2. Making sure you are on the right type of painkiller for the type of pain you have now.
3. Reducing any pain medication if the risks outweigh the benefits.
4. Learning as much as possible about your medication so that you can make informed and safe choices with your GP or pain specialist.
5. Recognising that some pain medication may have stopped working (tolerance).
6. Understanding that high doses of strong opioid medication can make pain worse (although low doses for short periods of time may be helpful for some people).

You will usually find an information leaflet inside your medication pack. Please read this if you have not done so already.

The common types of medication for pain are listed below.

Types of painkillers (Analgesics)

NSAIDS

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

Ibuprofen

Naproxen

Meloxicam

Diclofenac (Voltarol)

Celecoxib

Advantages of NSAIDS	Disadvantages/side effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Useful for reducing pain, swelling and inflammation.• Good for arthritis and joint pain.• Good for short term use.• Not addictive.• Good for flare-up episodes as part of your plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can cause high blood pressure (reduced blood flow to kidneys).• Can cause stomach problems and ulcers.• Need to take a stomach protector tablet with it.• Can cause kidney problems if used for a long time.• Can't be taken if you have certain medical problems or are taking certain other drugs.– ask your pharmacist



Anti-depressants

Amitriptyline

Nortriptyline

Some of the older types of antidepressants can be used in small doses to help nerve pain and to help you sleep.

Advantages of antidepressants	Side effects and disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May reduce nerve pain. • May help you sleep. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not help everyone. • Dose may need increasing. • Increased dose often causes increased side effects: • Dry mouth, constipation, weight gain, sleepiness in the day, poor concentration

If you are taking a newer type of anti-depressant for depression, rather than pain, you may also find that your sleep improves and your pain is more manageable. The chemicals that maintain our mood also affect our pain and sleep. Depression responds best to a combination of medication and talking therapy.

Anti-epileptic drugs

Pregabalin

Gabapentin

Advantages of anti-epileptics	Side effects and disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can reduce nerve pain for some people. • Can possibly reduce symptoms of fibromyalgia (although robust scientific evidence for this is still lacking). • May reduce diabetic neuropathy pain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Side effects of these drugs often outweighs pain relief. • Drowsiness. • Memory problems. • Weight gain. • Not to be taken for back pain. • Can be dangerous if used with strong opioid drugs.

Please speak to your GP, pharmacist or pain specialist if you have any questions or worries about using these drugs, especially if they are not helping your pain.



Opioids

Morphine (MST, Oramorph, Oxycodone, Codeine, Dihydrocodeine, Fentanyl, Tramadol)

There is now substantial evidence that opioid painkillers do not help reduce pain when they are taken for a long period of time.

If you are taking any of these type of painkillers, please read: "Opioids Aware" which has a resource for patients and is up to date with the latest evidence.

<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/faculty-of-pain-medicine/opioids-aware>

Advantages of opioids	Side effects and disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good for short term use after surgery or severe injury. • Good for Palliative care (end of life care). • May be helpful for chronic pain in a few patients if used at a low dose and for a short period of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nausea, sleepiness, confusion, constipation, weight gain, lack of sex drive. <p><i>If you take them for a long time:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance. • Dependence /withdrawals if you stop suddenly. • Itching. • Chronic constipation. • Insomnia. • Increased pain (especially with high doses). • Reduced sex hormones. • Reduced immune system. • Irregular periods. • Erectile dysfunction.

The maximum recommended dose for chronic/persistent pain is 120mg of morphine or morphine equivalent in 24 hours. You will learn more about opioid drugs on your pain management programme. You can also request to see one of the specialist pain nurses to reassure you and support you should you wish to slowly reduce your medication.

The good news is that we have helped many people reduce and stop these drugs slowly and safely without any problems. Pain is reported as "no worse" after reducing opioids and "much better" by many of our patients.



!!! Do not stop taking opioids suddenly. Always reduce slowly with support and supervision of your GP or pain specialist.!!!

What's the best way to reduce? If you normally take 8 tablets per day, take 7 tablets per day for one week. Take your medication at regular times. Then take 6 tablets per day for one week. Keep reducing gradually and steadily.

Keep a record of your progress and set dates for each stage of your reduction

Won't my pain be worse? You may be taking several drugs and still be in pain. Drugs may, perhaps, "take the edge off" but many people still report being in pain all the time. The good news is that pain management makes you feel more comfortable for longer and is, therefore, more effective than medication in the long-term. Relaxation, pacing, distraction and increasing your fitness all reduce pain levels and enable you to manage your pain better without drugs.

Many people who have been through Pain Management programmes are now drug-free. They say that their pain is no worse than before (some report reduced pain without medication!).

Points to remember

Problems

- Painkillers don't take away all the pain.
- They may have unpleasant side effects.
- Strong painkillers can damage your health and can increase your pain and reduce your sex hormone levels.
- Stronger painkillers can become less effective over time.
- Both you and your doctor might become frustrated trying to "cure the pain".
- You might need more tablets for the side effects of the painkillers.
- Painkillers are not a "magic bullet" , often it's a case of trial and error to try and find anything suitable. There is no "one size fits all" when it comes to painkillers.

Solutions

- Used sensibly, painkillers can be a helpful part of your "toolkit".
- Using pain management techniques can help you feel better.
- Using pain management techniques as a way of life can reduce your reliance on medication.
- Reducing strong painkillers slowly is safe and often people do not feel more pain after stopping.
- Learning more about how, and when to use your medication will make you feel more in control.
- Taking medication at regular intervals can help as part of your set-back/flare up plan.
- Many people manage pain without medication.
- Always read the leaflet in your medication packet and let your doctor know if you have unpleasant side effects or if you feel that they are not helping. (your doctor needs your feedback - only you will know if your pain medication is helping you).

Never take medication that has been prescribed for someone else and never, ever, buy medication on the internet. Medication bought online is not regulated and you can never be sure what is in it.