

Gold Coast Health Service

Management of Acute Pain: Patient Information

Pain relief expectations

Good control of acute pain will improve your recovery and allow you to return to your normal daily activities faster. The goal of pain relief is to keep your pain at a manageable level where you can function and recover. This DOES NOT MEAN you will be completely pain free. Being pain free would require large doses of pain relievers that could make you too drowsy and at risk of side effects. Your pain level may vary day to day as you become more mobile, but it should improve overall. If your pain is getting consistently worse, you should consult your GP or return to the hospital.

The main types of medications used to treat acute pain are described below:

Paracetamol

Paracetamol is used to treat and prevent mild to moderate pain and can be combined with other pain medications to relieve more severe pain. It works best for pain when taken at regular intervals and may reduce the need for stronger pain relievers. Overall, the risk of side effects is low.

Adults SHOULD NOT TAKE more than 8 paracetamol tablets OR 6 Paracetamol modified release formulations in a 24-hour period. Exceeding the maximum dose may damage your liver. Adults with a low body weight or, who are elderly, may require a lower dose. The dose given to children depends on their age and weight. Only ever take the amount prescribed by your doctor.

Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDS)

These medications are used to treat acute pain, inflammation and swelling. They should only be used for a limited period. They work well in combination with paracetamol to control mild to moderate pain. At Gold Coast Health Service, we commonly use the following:

Ibuprofen (Nurofen, Brufen) **Celecoxib** (Celebrex) **Diclofenac** (Voltaren)

Side effects may include heartburn, stomach upset, vomiting, diarrhoea or headache.

When taken with food some of the side effects are minimised. If you experience blood in vomit, blackened bowel motion, skin rash, swollen ankles, trouble breathing or wheezing, **STOP NSAID IMMEDIATELY** and consult your GP or go to your local hospital emergency department.

Opioids/Strong Pain Relievers

Opioids are used to treat moderate to severe acute pain after surgery or injury. They include but are not limited to morphine, oxycodone, tapentadol, codeine, and tramadol. The dose varies between people and dosages are worked out based on age and other factors.

If used SHORT term (5 days or less) these medications effectively treat strong pain with a low risk of addiction or dependence. Continued use of these medications over 5 days increases your chance of dependence and the risk of severe harm.

Side Effects

Sedation and drowsiness: If you or your family notice you become very drowsy or have trouble staying awake while taking opioids, your dose will need to be reduced. **DO NOT** take any more until you are wide awake. If there are any concerns with the level of drowsiness you are experiencing contact 000 or your GP.

Constipation: Many people experience constipation with the use of strong pain relievers. Lifestyle changes such as increasing fibre in your diet and increasing fluid intake may help to prevent constipation. Sometimes laxatives may be used to treat or prevent constipation. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any constipation treatment.

Whilst on these medications:

- **DO NOT take more than is prescribed**
- **DO NOT take sleeping tablets or drink alcohol**
- **DO NOT make important personal or business decisions or sign legal documents**
- **DO NOT drive or operate machinery including power tools**
- **Take care with potentially hazardous activities at home such as boiling the kettle**

Additional Measures for Breast Feeding Mothers

Do NOT co-sleep with your baby whilst taking opioids. If you or your baby are very sleepy or having trouble staying awake, stop taking your opioid medication and call 000.

Nerve Pain

Sometimes as a result of your injury or surgery, pressure can be placed on nerves within your body causing nerve pain. Nerve pain is often described as “burning”, “shooting” or “numb” pain or persistent feelings of “pins and needles”. Nerve pain often requires a different treatment. These medications could result in some drowsiness and dizziness. This usually settles after a few days. If you feel unsteady, dizzy or experience mood changes when taking these medications, talk to your doctor as the dose may need to be reduced.

As the swelling from the injury or operation reduces, there should be less pressure on the surrounding nerves and your pain will improve. Nerve pain medications will only be used for a short time and advice will be given to you and your GP on how to safely stop these medications.

Weaning Pain Medications

As your pain improves your dose of medication will reduce over time.

Advice will be given to you and your GP on how to safely stop opioid medications

Safety Measures

- **DO NOT** give your pain medications to anyone else to take.
- Keep your medications in a safe place well out of reach of children. The dose that controls your pain could seriously harm or cause death of a young child.
- Pain medications can interfere with other medications you may take. It is always important to tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you take any other prescription medicines e.g. blood thinners, antidepressants. Even some simple over the counter or herbal supplements that you don't need a prescription for can interact with your pain medications. E.g. cold and flu tablets, St John's Wort herbal supplement.
- Keep your medication in a cool dry place.
- Once you no longer require the pain medication, take it to your local community pharmacy and they will dispose of it safely for you.

Non-medication related treatments

Whilst medications are available to assist in treating your pain, it is important to remember there are other non-medication related methods of treating pain. These include:

- Physiotherapy
- Exercise as directed by your doctor or physiotherapist e.g. walking, deep breathing exercises
- Listening to music
- Acupuncture
- Mindfulness

Always consult with your doctor before undertaking any of these activities to ensure they are suitable for you.

If you have any questions or concerns about your acute pain management medications, please contact Gold Coast University Hospital Pharmacy Department (5687 0620) or Robina Hospital Pharmacy Department (5668 6691) or speak with your GP or Community Pharmacist.

Interpreter services



Gold Coast Health provides interpreter services for patients attending the hospital who are from non-English speaking backgrounds. If you require the assistance of an interpreter, please indicate this on your registration form and advise the hospital prior to any medical appointments.

Interpreter services are provided free-of-charge to all patients who require the service, including non-Medicare patients.