

Opioid painkillers – keep them short, stay safe

Information for patients

Opioids ('strong painkillers' such as tramadol, morphine and oxycodone) can be really useful for a short time to help with your recovery after an injury or surgery. However, they can cause side effects and aren't very effective in the longer term. It's best that you don't take them for any longer than you need to.

Opioids can cause side effects, such as:

- Nausea, vomiting and constipation
- Feeling drowsy, dizzy or confused
- Increased risk of having a fall
- Dry mouth
- Sweating.

If taken for a long time, additional problems can include:

- Weight gain
- Sleep problems
- Forget things / memory loss
- Reduced sex drive, erectile dysfunction, infertility
- Mood changes
- Immune system affected - increased risk of infections
- Increased risk of falls and broken bones
- Increased levels of pain.

Other possible consequences:

Tolerance – your body gets used to the opioid, the same dose is less effective than it used to be

Dependence – withdrawal symptoms if stopping suddenly

Addiction – psychological dependence and behaviour patterns develop

Your GP or pharmacist will encourage you to reduce the dose and stop your painkiller as your pain improves. They may ask you to make an appointment for a pain review.

It is important that you do not take more than the recommended dose of the painkiller and that you read the information that comes with the medicine.

If you have any questions about your medicine, please speak to a pharmacist or your GP.