Opioids for pain relief after surgery

Enhanced recovery after surgery program

TO BETTER GUIDE YOU

After your surgery, managing your pain is very important. It'll help you to recover.

What is an opioid?

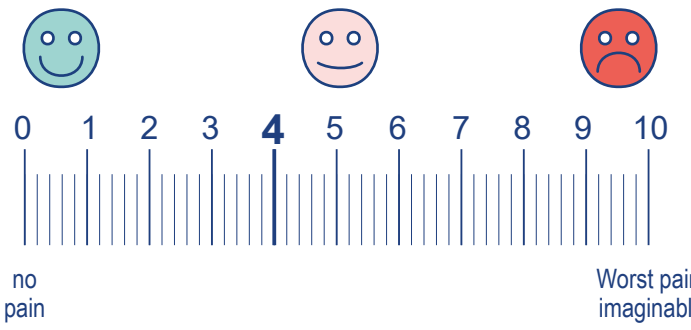
An opioid is a medication used to relieve severe pain.
It can be given by injection or as a pill to swallow.

To relieve pain

You are the best person to describe your pain. Your nurse will assess the intensity of your pain to help provide the best possible relief.

Your pain level and how drowsy you feel will be checked regularly, especially before the opioid medication is given.

The pain scale



Tell your nurse the number that best describes your pain.

0 = No pain.

10 = The worst pain imaginable.

Your pain should stay at a 4 or lower.

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Side effects

Pain-relief medications can cause:

- feeling drowsy
- dizziness
- nausea (feeling that you want to vomit)
- vomiting
- itching
- constipation

Tell your nurse if you have any of these side effects. Some of them can be relieved with medication.

When to take opioids

To relieve pain, follow your doctor's instructions.

Start with acetaminophen (for example, Tylenol) and an anti-inflammatory medication if your doctor has prescribed one (for example, Celebrex).

If your pain is more intense, your doctor may prescribe a stronger medication such as an opioid (for example, Dilaudid, morphine, oxycodone, or tramadol). You can continue taking Tylenol and the anti-inflammatory medication as prescribed by your doctor.

Take your medication before the pain becomes too strong. This will make it easier to manage.

- At the hospital, ask for pain medication when needed.
- If your pain is not well managed, tell your nurse. Your surgeon may change your prescription.
- At home, take your medication as directed

Opioid dependence and addiction

When opioids are used to relieve pain, they rarely cause dependence or addiction. However, if they are used to increase feelings of well-being or pleasure, there's a risk of dependence or addiction.

Tell your surgeon if you've taken opioids before or if you've ever had a dependence or addiction.

Important to remember

- Do not drive after taking opioids. These medications can make you sleepy and less alert.
- Always take the dose prescribed by your doctor.
- Drink enough water and eat high-fibre foods to help prevent constipation. If you're already constipated, tell your surgeon. They may prescribe a mild laxative.
- If you're taking other medications at the same time as opioids (for example sleeping pills or antidepressants), or if you drink alcohol or use drugs, tell your doctor. They will make sure that your treatment is safe for you.

Questions?

Your care team is there to help you.

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