

Patient Information Leaflet

Reviewing and reducing opioid medicine (tablets and skin patches)

Long-term (chronic) pain can cause low mood, irritability, poor sleep and reduced ability to move around. Unlike short-term (acute pain), chronic pain is difficult to treat. Different treatments work for different people, but most will aim to help you manage your pain.

Medicines generally, and opioids in particular, are often not very effective for treating chronic pain. Other non-medicine treatments may be used such as electrical stimulating techniques (TENS machine), acupuncture, advice about activity and increasing physical fitness and psychological treatments and therapy.

Helping you understand about chronic pain is important. Physical activity does not usually cause further injury and is therefore safe.

Can I take opioid medicine long-term?

While opioids can have a positive benefit for some people living with long-term pain they can cause serious harm, especially when they are not being taken as prescribed. It is important to discuss the risks and benefits of continuing this medicine with your doctor regularly. Evidence suggests that risks to your health increase significantly when taking opioids at high doses for a long period of time.

If you take opioid medicines for many months it can affect your body in a number of ways, including:

- failing memory
- falls
- reduced fertility (difficulty getting pregnant)
- low sex drive
- irregular periods in women
- erectile dysfunction in men (the inability to keep an erection)
- reduced ability to fight infection
- increased levels of pain

Reviewing your use of opioids

Everyone prescribed opioid medicines in the long-term should have them reviewed by their doctor at regular intervals. It is recommended that your doctor reduces your opioid medication every so often to check they still work for you and you are not having side effects.

Many people find that they can reduce their opioid dose without more pain. As fewer side effects occur, quality and enjoyment of life can improve.

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