

## Opioids

### What is an opioid?

An opioid is a medicine used to treat strong pain. Opioids are only available on a prescription.

Your prescriber will only recommend an opioid if they feel it is safe and appropriate for you. Examples of opioids include medicines such as oxycodone, morphine, tapentadol, tramadol and codeine.

Opioids should only be used as prescribed, and if you have severe pain that has not responded to other pain relief. Do not take more tablets than have been prescribed.

### Opioids will affect your reflexes and reaction times and can make you drowsy.

#### If you have taken opioids:

- Do not drive, ride a bike or operate machinery for 12 hours
- Do not make important personal or business decisions or sign legal documents
- Be cautious with tasks that need you to concentrate
- Do not drink alcohol or take sleeping tablets.

### Opioids can cause serious side effects

Call 000 if you have trouble breathing OR severe drowsiness (cannot stay awake) after taking opioids.

### Opioids can cause constipation:

- Drink lots of water
- Use laxative medication such as Coloxyl with Senna® or Movicol® if required
- Exercise or move about as much as possible.

Opioids are recommended for short term acute pain management.

Opioids can harm long term health.

They can also be habit-forming or addictive; this is why it is important to take them less often as your condition improves.

## Other important things to know about opioids

### Storage:

- Never give your medications to anyone else
- Store your medications in a safe place (preferably locked), out of the reach of children.

### Disposal:

- Your opioids should be taken to your community pharmacy for safe disposal once no longer needed for the reason they were prescribed.

### References:

Endone, eMIMsPlus, August 2023. Oxycodone, Queensland Health, Clinical Excellence Queensland. Oxycodone, Metro North Hospital and Health Service Pain Australia, <https://www.painaustralia.org.au/about-pain/what-is-pain>. Guidelines for safe paracetamol use, Queensland Health, 2023. [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/1211443/guideline-safe-paracetamol-use.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1211443/guideline-safe-paracetamol-use.pdf), Pain management on discharge, 2020, Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service.



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Townsville  
Hospital  
and Health  
Service

# Managing your Acute Pain

## Information about your pain medications and how to use them safely.

Pain is a personal experience that can sometimes be better managed by things other than medicine.

This pamphlet is a general guide for patients prescribed opioids for short-term acute pain relief.

**Please ask your doctor or pharmacist or call 13HEALTH if you have questions about your medications, or any information in this pamphlet.**

Version 1

Last reviewed: February 2024

Review date: February 2026



## What is acute pain?

Acute pain lasts for a short time and occurs following surgery or trauma. Acute pain usually improves as the body heals.

## When do I need to take pain medications?

Do you have pain at rest?

Can you do activities such as walking or deep breathing easily?

The aim of pain relief is NOT to be pain free but able to do activities of daily living.

Give your pain a score from 0 - 10

0 = No pain, no limitations to activity

10 = Worst pain ever, pain at rest, unable to do anything due to pain

**1-3**  
Mild pain

Try non-medication methods (ice-packs, rest).  
Take paracetamol if needed.

**4-6**  
Moderate pain

Take paracetamol regularly.  
If advised, take an anti-inflammatory medication.  
If pain persists take prescribed opioid

**7-10**  
Severe pain

Continue to take paracetamol regularly.  
If advised, take an anti-inflammatory medication. Take your opioid medication as prescribed.  
See your GP or attend the Emergency Department if pain persists.

## Non-drug methods for managing pain:

- Check with your doctor to see if it is safe to use hot/cold packs on painful areas
- Change the position of your body
- Use distraction techniques such as reading a book, listening to music or watching a movie
- Pace your activity based on your pain levels.

## You can get simple pain relief medicines from a pharmacy or supermarket:

### Paracetamol

Paracetamol is the recommended first choice for pain relief in most patients. It can come in different strengths and different brands. It is important not to take more than the maximum dose in a 24 hour period.

Medicine	Dose	Dosing	Maximum dose in a 24 hour period
Paracetamol 500mg (Panadol®, Panamax®)	2 tablets (1000mg)	Every 4-6 hours	8 tablets* (4000mg)
OR			
Paracetamol 665mg (Panadol Osteo®, Osteomol®)	2 tablets (1330mg)	Every 8 hours	6 tablets* (3990mg)

*\*Note: If you weigh less than 50kg, or are older than 80 years of age your maximum safe dose of paracetamol is 3000mg in a 24 hour period.*

### Ibuprofen

Ibuprofen is an anti-inflammatory medicine that may be used short term for acute pain. It may be taken without food but if it upsets your stomach, try taking it with a meal.

Ibuprofen may not be recommended if you have certain medical conditions or are taking certain medicines. It is important to check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking ibuprofen or other anti-inflammatory medicines to ensure they are safe and appropriate for you.

Medicine	Dose	Dosing	Maximum dose in a 24 hour period
Ibuprofen 200mg (Nurofen, Advil)	2 tablets (400mg)	Every 6 – 8 hours	6 tablets (1200mg)