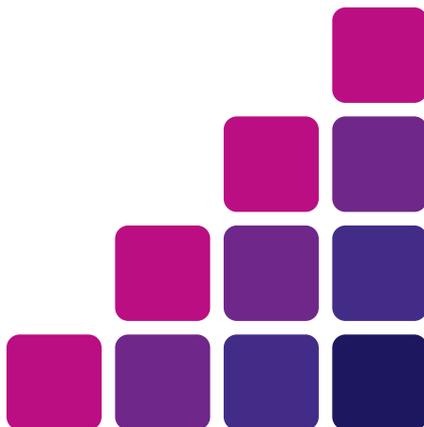




Managing your pain at home after surgery

Information for patients



Managing your pain at home after surgery

This leaflet has been written in order to give you some advice regarding your pain management when you return home.

We hope this will be beneficial, however it is not intended to replace the existing information that may have already been given to you by your doctor, nurse or pharmacist prior to discharge.

Who can I contact for more information?

If you have any queries please contact:

Pain Management Team
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital
369 Fulham Road
London
SW10 9NH

T: 020 3315 8000

Notes

Why do I need to carry on taking pain medication once I am discharged?

You may feel ready to leave the hospital, however it may take some time to fully recover.

Pain medications will ensure you can return to your normal daily activities without experiencing too much discomfort.

It may take up to a few weeks to return back to your normal daily life.

When will somebody give me my pain medications to take home?

On the day of discharge, either the ward nurse or pharmacist will explain each of your medications to you.

They will discuss which medication you will be given to take home, how often you should take your medication, and how long to take it for.

If you need to ask any more questions or feel unsure about anything, then please ask.

How much supply will I receive of each pain medication?

This will vary, however you will generally be given a 1–2 week supply of each pain medication on discharge which is usually sufficient.

You may need to see your GP and get a new prescription if you are still in pain after this period.

Visiting your GP will give you the opportunity to speak to them regarding pain management and ask for any further advice or express any concerns that you may have.

When should I take my pain medication?

You should take your pain medications at regular intervals whilst you feel in pain, rather than waiting until the pain is really bad.

This prevents the build-up of pain and means you are in charge rather than the pain being in charge of you.

It will state clearly on your prescription how often you can take a particular pain medication.

Here is how to space your tablets according to how often they can be taken:

- **Once daily:** first thing in the morning or at bedtime, depending on the drug—ask if you are not sure
- **Twice daily:** first thing in the morning (8am) and before bed (8pm)
- **Three times:** first thing in the morning (8am), after lunch (2pm) and before bed (10pm)
- **Four times:** first thing in the morning (8am), at lunch (12pm), at tea time (6pm) and before bed (10pm)

Regular pain medication will provide you with the most effective pain management possible.

How long will I need to take my pain medication for?

This can vary between individuals and the type of surgery, however it would be advisable to take regular pain medication for at least seven days after your discharge date from hospital.

It may even take up to two weeks before you can start to reduce pain medication.

What can I do if my pain becomes unbearable?

If you are taking **all** of your discharge pain medications regularly and you are still experiencing uncontrollable pain we advise you make a **GP appointment** where they can discuss your pain management regime with you.

The GP may suggest an alternative or additional pain medication.

I have heard pain medications have lots of side effects?

Constipation is the most common side effect of pain medication.

It causes slow bowel movements, therefore you may need to take medications called laxatives in order to prevent this.

Laxatives soften the stool and will help you to have regular bowel function.

We will often prescribe laxatives for you when you leave hospital and explain how often and when you need to take them.

If you have any questions or concerns then please ask to speak to a member of staff.

Eating foods rich in fibre (fruit and vegetables, wholemeal cereals and bread, beans and pulses) and drinking lots of fluid will help with regular bowel function.

Unless you have been advised otherwise, try to drink at least 1,500ml each day. Mobilisation is also the key to regular bowel function.

If you feel at all constipated and you have tried to relieve this by taking laxatives, drinking lots of fluid, mobilisation and eating a high fibre diet then please contact your GP who will be able to help you.

If you are feeling sick (nauseous) or vomiting then please also contact your GP for advice.

Anti-sickness medication and/or a change of laxative may help relieve this problem.

Other potential side effects include drowsiness.

How do I reduce my pain medications?

It is crucial that you do not suddenly stop your pain medication, even if you feel well and are experiencing little or no pain.

You should reduce your dose gradually to prevent your pain from returning.

You should consider reducing your pain medication when you feel you are back to a relatively normal level of activity, are comfortable (both at rest and on movement/exercise) and are no longer requiring additional pain medication in between your regular doses.

The most effective way to reduce your pain medication is by reducing the strongest one first (see Table 1 below).

Do not try to wean yourself off more than one pain medication at a time, and reach your target before moving onto another.

Return to your original dose if you suddenly start to experience pain and

then you can consider the weaning off process again a few days later when you feel comfortable and confident to do so.

If you have been on Gabapentin for two or more weeks it is advisable to wean this medication rather than just stopping it. This applies to whether you are taking 100mg, 200mg or 300mg three times a day (see Table 2 below).

Table 1: Example of reducing pain medications—Tramadol

Mrs S wants to reduce Tramadol 100mg four times a day. She works out that she has taken eight tablets each day (two tablets, four times a day) which is the maximum recommended dose.

It is a Monday morning and she feels ready to start reducing her Tramadol. This is how she should reduce:

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
8am	2 tablets	2 tablets	2 tablets	2 tablets	none
12 noon	2 tablets	none	none	none	none
6pm	none	none	none	none	none
10pm	2 tablets	2 tablets	2 tablets	none	none

Table 2: Example of reducing pain medications—Gabapentin

Mrs S wants to now reduce her Gabapentin, 300mg three times a day. She has been having three tablets a day (one tablet three times a day).

This is how she should reduce:

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
8am	1 tablet	1 tablet	none	none	none
2pm	none	none	none	none	none
8pm	1 tablet	1 tablet	1 tablet	1 tablet	none

Important tips about the pain medications you may be given

1. Always read the prescription, the medication labels, and the information sheet enclosed in each package of pain medication.
2. Paracetamol is present in numerous pain medications such as:
 - co-codamol/co-dydramol
 - tramacet
 - cough/cold/flu remedies

Please be aware of this and do not take more than one drug containing paracetamol at any one time.

If you need any advice or are unsure whether a particular pain medication contains paracetamol then ask your pharmacist or your GP.

3. If you are given any anti-inflammatory pain medications such as ibuprofen or diclofenac, only take these for three days unless otherwise directed.

Make sure you drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration, avoid alcohol, and always take with or just after food.

If you experience any of the following then stop taking these medications:

- shortness of breath
- facial swelling
- unexplained bruising
- stomach pains
- indigestion
- heartburn
- vomiting of blood
- blood in the stools

Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have concerns or wish to give feedback about services, your care or treatment, you can contact the PALS office on the Ground Floor of the hospital just behind the main reception.

Alternatively, you can send us your comments or suggestions on one of our comment cards, available at the PALS office, or on a feedback form on our website www.chelwest.nhs.uk/pals.

We value your opinion and invite you to provide us with feedback.

T: 020 3315 6727

E: cwpals@chelwest.nhs.uk

Chelsea and Westminster Hospital

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February 2016

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Speak to your clinician