

Opioid Medication and Chronic Pain

What are Opioids?

Opioids are the strongest pain killers we can prescribe. They include mild opioids like Codeine and Tramadol, as well as strong opioids like morphine, oxycodone, buprenorphine, and fentanyl.



What are they used for?

Opiate medications are useful as a short-term measure to help combat acute, severe pain like after an operation or a serious injury.

What are the risks of Opioid use?

These include addiction, overdose, tolerance, side effects, interactions with other drugs and withdrawal.

How to recognise Opioid Dependence?

There are many ways you can recognise opioid dependence in yourself or someone else, these include regularly taking the maximum dose or higher and experiencing unpleasant side effects or withdrawal symptoms when you miss or reduce your dose. Please visit the Opioid Medication page on the patient info section on our website for more information.

Why does it still hurt?

Acute or short-term pain usually happens in response to an injury, trauma, or damage to the body such as nerve damage, broken limbs etc. However, after 3-6 months the original damage to the body has usually healed or settled as much as it is going to (unless it is due to an inflammatory condition such as arthritis)



Scientific research has found that pain that lasts longer than 3 months is likely to be due to changes in the nervous system rather than because of ongoing damage or injury. No-one knows why chronic pain develops in some people, but it is a common condition that affects more than 1 in 5 of people in the UK.

Why don't Opioids work for chronic pain?

Clinical evidence shows that opioid use for the management of chronic pain is ineffective and has the potential to be harmful. Because chronic pain lasts a long time, taking pain medication for an equally long time runs the risk of becoming unintentionally addicted.



Managing chronic pain can be complex and there can be many factors which contribute to it. Some of these may be physical, others may be emotional and social.

There is no medication that can completely remove chronic pain, however you can be supported to cope better with it. Anxiety and stress can reduce your ability to manage pain, and things such as healthy diet, good sleep, gentle

exercise, and mindfulness can help reduce your body's sensitivity to pain.

For more information, please visit the section "Opioid medication" on our website which can be found by clicking on the "Patient Information" coloured tile on the home page or alternatively, ask for our patient information leaflets on chronic pain.