

‘As required’ strong opioid pain relief medication

(also known as ‘PRN’ medication)

What are the medications for use ‘as required’?

The strong opioids used most commonly are:

- Morphine sulfate liquid or morphine sulfate tablets
- Oxycodone liquid or oxycodone capsules

Ask your doctor or nurse to specify the brand you have been given.

Why is ‘as required’ opioid medication used?

Most often it is used to treat pain that occurs either:

- Suddenly or unexpectedly (spontaneous pain)
- On movement or during an activity (incident pain)
- If the regular pain medication does not work well enough all the time (breakthrough pain).

How do I take ‘as required’ opioid medication?

Your prescription will clearly state how often you can take the ‘as required’ medication.

It may take 20-30 minutes before you notice an effect. If you are still in pain 60-90 minutes after taking an ‘as required’ dose, you may repeat the dose.

If you notice you need to take several doses of ‘as required’ medication, please let your doctor or nurse know. They might suggest an adjustment of all of your pain relief medication.

If you take the ‘as required’ medication to avoid predictable, movement related pain (incident pain), we suggest that you take it 20-30 minutes before a planned activity.

Are there any side effects from taking ‘as required’ pain relief medication?

Sleepiness:

This is most common when you first take ‘as required’ pain relief medication or when the dose is increased. It should improve after a few days.

Constipation:

This is a very common side effect. It is important to drink plenty of fluids and always take a laxative regularly as prescribed by your doctor. The dose of laxative can be increased or reduced to make sure you pass a soft motion regularly.

Sickness:

This is most common when you first take pain relief medication. It should improve after a few days. If you feel sick when you first start to take 'as required' pain relief medication, try taking it with food. Your doctor may need to give you some anti-sickness medicine for a few days until the sickness goes away.

Will I become addicted to strong pain relief medication and be unable to stop taking it?

No. If you no longer need to take the 'as required' pain relief medication you can stop after discussion with your doctor or nurse.

Will the 'as required' pain relief medication always relieve my pain completely?

Although they are very good pain killers, they may not help for every type of pain. Other treatments may be needed and suggested by your doctor or nurse.

How will I know if the opioid medication is not suitable for me?

You may feel unwell in one or more of these ways:

- Feel more sleepy than usual
- Feeling sick most of the time
- Restlessness or jumpiness
- Have hallucinations

Do not worry if this happens. Tell your doctor or nurse. They may reduce the dose, change to a different pain relief medication and suggest other treatments to help the pain.

Can I drive?

Once you get used to taking morphine or oxycodone (strong opioid pain relief) 'as required' and do not feel sleepy or unwell you may be able to drive. You must discuss this with your doctor first. You must not drive if you feel that your driving may be impaired by pain, your condition or medication. Following recent advice from the Department of Transport please carry evidence that you have been prescribed morphine or oxycodone (strong opioid pain relief) 'as required' by a doctor, in case you are stopped by the Police.

Can I drink alcohol?

A small glass of wine, beer, sherry or whisky is usually permitted, but you should discuss this with your doctor. It is best to avoid more than a small drink otherwise you may become too drowsy.

Any questions?

If you have any questions about your 'as required' medication or other medicines, please ask your hospital ward doctor or nurse, your GP or community palliative care nurse, if you have one. You can also contact the hospital Medicines Information Centre on Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm via: **01444 454388**.

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