

Taking medication for chronic pain

Medications used to help reduce pain are called analgesics. They can also be known as “pain killers”. It is unlikely that medication alone will cure or relieve your pain totally. For this reason we use the terms pain relief or pain management medications.

The benefit from taking medication should always be more than any side effects you may have. Only you;

- Know how bad your pain is
- Are able to say if your medication is helping
- Know what side effects you are having

Understanding how your medication works may help you to get the best pain relief from it with the least side-effects. You should know which ones should be taken regularly and which should be taken only when required.

Medication used to help manage chronic pain is a piece of the pain self management jigsaw. They should be used alongside other self help pain management tools.

Which pain relief should I use?

The type of pain you have and how sore you are will help you to decide which pain relief may help you. It may be useful to keep a diary of your pain and other symptoms. Your other medical conditions and medications may also be important when choosing pain relief.

The three main types of pain are mechanical, inflammatory and neuropathic. You may have more than one type of pain and might need to take more than one type of medication.

Your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist can give you advice on which pain relief may help. They can also help you find the best way to take your medication. They can advise you on putting your dose

up safely if your pain is worse and on reducing your medication when your pain is less.

Common mistakes that can be made with medication for chronic pain include:

- Not taking them regularly enough or for long enough to fully assess the benefit
- Not taking the right pain relief for the type of pain
- Continuing to take them when there is little or no benefit
- Continuing to take them for too long when no longer needed

If you are breastfeeding, pregnant or likely to become pregnant, you should let your doctor, pain specialist or pharmacist know.

Benefit

Not everyone will benefit from every medication. It is not possible to predict. For this reason a trial of medication is often recommended. It may take a few trials to find the one which works best for you.

A 30% reduction in pain or an improvement in function is considered a good outcome (benefit). A little less pain may mean you can manage daily activities better.

Side effects

All medicines can cause side effects but not everyone will get them. A full list is in the patient information sheet with your prescription.

Building the dose up slowly can reduce some side effects. Others may pass or become less once you have been on a medicine for a few days.

If side effects go on and become a problem, or you have others not expected, then speak to your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist.

Some pain relief can cause drowsiness. If medication makes you feel drowsy you should avoid driving or operating machinery. It is a criminal offence to drive a vehicle whilst unsafe due to medicine use. Alcohol may make the sleepiness worse and should be avoided where possible

You should be aware of the risk of tolerance, dependence and addiction with some pain relief medication. This can be discussed with your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist.

Review

As with other chronic (long term) conditions, like high blood pressure or asthma, regular medication review is recommended. A review every 6-12 months is useful to check:

- Whether pain is still a problem
- Whether you are still getting benefit
- If there are any side effects

Other information

Do not share or take other peoples medication. Always advise your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist about any other medication or products you are taking. Including things bought from the pharmacy, herbal supplements or non- prescribed medicines.

You can buy paracetamol and ibuprofen (tablets or gel) and low dose paracetamol combinations, for example co-codamol 8/500, from the pharmacy. You will need a prescription for other pain medication.

Please ask if you require any leaflets giving more information on pain medications.

Remember to always store medication safely and out of the reach of children.



Taking Medication for Chronic Pain

Patient Information Leaflet



GETTING YOU ON TRACK TO RECOVERY

NHS Fife provides accessible communication in a variety of formats including for people who are speakers of community languages, who require Easy Read versions, who speak BSL, read Braille or use Audio formats.

NHS Fife SMS text service number 07805800005 is available for people who have a hearing or speech impairment.

To find out more about accessible formats contact:
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