

# Opioids



## Pain Service

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[www.bcchildrens.ca](http://www.bcchildrens.ca)

## Opioids include:

- ▶ Morphine (MOS®, M-Eslon®, other)
- ▶ Hydromorphone (Dilaudid®, other)
- ▶ Codeine
- ▶ Oxycodone (Oxycontin®, other)
- ▶ Fentanyl (Duragesic®, Sublimaze®)
- ▶ Meperidine (Demerol®, other)
- ▶ Methadone

## What are opioids?

Opioids are a class of medications that are sometimes known as narcotic analgesics. They are mainly used in the treatment of pain. Opioids may be used on a short-term or long-term basis depending on the type of pain being treated.

Opioids work in the central nervous system. They alter the release of certain brain transmitters that are involved in causing pain. Such as acetylcholine, noradrenalin, substance p and dopamine.

Over time you may become tolerant to the effects of opioids. This means that you may need to take more to get the same amount of pain relief. Your doctor will work with you to determine when it is time to adjust your dose. You may also become dependent on opioids, which means that you could develop withdrawal side effects if you suddenly stop taking the medication or if you reduce the dose too fast. Just because you may develop tolerance or dependence does not mean that you are addicted to this medication.

## How to use and store this medication:

- ▶ These medications are available in many different forms, including injectable, oral (tablet, liquid or capsule), or patch.

- ▶ Store the medication at room temperature away from heat, moisture and direct light.
- ▶ Store the medication out of reach of children.
- ▶ If you are using the fentanyl patch, dispose of it by folding it in half and flushing it down the toilet. There is enough medication left in the patch to seriously harm another child or an animal.

## If you miss a dose:

- ▶ If you miss a dose or forget to take your medication, take it as soon as you remember. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, do not take the missed dose or double your next dose. Instead, continue your regular dosing schedule. If you are unsure what to do about a missed dose, contact your doctor or pharmacist.
- ▶ Do **not** take extra medication to make up for a missed dose

## Drugs and food to avoid:

- ▶ Ask your doctor or pharmacist before using any other medication, including non-prescription medications, vitamins and herbal products.

## Warnings:

- ▶ Make sure your doctor knows if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if you have kidney or liver disease
- ▶ Do **not** stop taking this medication suddenly without asking your doctor. This medication is usually decreased slowly before it is stopped completely
- ▶ Opioids can be sedating, especially when used in combination with other sedating medications or alcohol.
- ▶ Do not drive or do anything dangerous until you know how this medication makes you feel.

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## Side effects:

This list of side effects is important for you to be aware of; however, it is also important to remember that not all side effects happen to all people.

These are some less serious side effects of taking opioids. Many of these less serious side effects will improve over the first few days of taking the medication. If you have problems with these less serious side effects, talk with your doctor or pharmacist:

- ▶ Dizziness, lightheadedness, drowsiness
- ▶ Nausea or vomiting
- ▶ Constipation. This is most common with codeine
- ▶ Blurred or double vision
- ▶ Nervousness or restlessness
- ▶ Nightmares or unusual dreams
- ▶ Difficulty with urination
- ▶ Dry mouth



Call 911 and get help right away if any of the following symptoms of an overdose occur:

- ▶ Seizures, confusion, severe nervousness or restlessness, severe dizziness, severe drowsiness, slow or troubled breathing, and severe weakness.



Call your doctor right away if you have any of these side effects:

- ▶ Hallucinations, mental depression or mood changes
- ▶ Unusual excitement or restlessness
- ▶ Uncontrolled movements
- ▶ Hives, itching, skin rash

**If you have any other side effects that you think are caused by this medication, tell your doctor or pharmacist.**

- ▶ If you experience dry mouth try chewing sugarless gum, taking sips of water or using a saliva substitute.
- ▶ Constipation usually does not improve over time and you may need to take a laxative on a regular or as-needed basis. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for help choosing a laxative if you experience constipation.



If you have questions about pain management in children, call:

- BCCH Pain Service at 604-875-2345 ext 5108 or
- Call for free if you live in BC at 1-888-3088 extension (5108).

**It's good to ask.**