

Information for patients receiving opioid treatment for acute pain



Information till dig som får behandling
med opioid för akut smärta

Terapigrupp Smärta, april 2018

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You have been prescribed _____ as a painkiller.

The active substance in the drug is what is known as an opioid. An opioid is either morphine or a drug similar to morphine that has the same analgesic (painkilling) effect, but also the same risk of side effects and dependence as morphine. All opioids used for pain relief are classified as narcotics. If you have received codeine, which is a substance included in the drug Citodon for example, it is transformed by your body into morphine. Remember to tell your doctor if you are taking other drugs. This is particularly important if you are taking sedatives or sleep-inducing drugs (e.g. benzodiazepines). You must also tell your doctor if you are taking non-prescription drugs or naturopathic/homeopathic products.

Effects and side effects

Opioids are a very good form of pain control in the case of acute pain, but it is important that you follow the prescription you have been given. The aim is to ensure you receive a dose that gives you the best available pain relief with as few side effects as possible. Insufficient pain relief increases the risk of developing long-term pain that is significantly more difficult to treat. On the other hand, a dose that is too high results in an increase in the side effects of the opioids, such as dizziness, constipation, nausea, tiredness and sleep disruption. Opioids also result in poorer coordination and balance.

During treatment, you are advised to avoid driving or similar activities that require a great deal of concentration. You must also avoid drinking alcohol or taking sedatives/sleep-inducing drugs (benzodiazepines) at the same time as this involves an increased risk of serious side effects.

Discontinue treatment at the right time

It should be noted that if you have been receiving treatment for more than two weeks or so, there is a certain risk that you will experience unpleasant symptoms when you discontinue treatment, such as sleep disruption, yawning, runny nose, dilated (widened) pupils, goose pimples and nausea. These are symptoms of abstinence, although abstinence is not the same as dependence. You should therefore come to an agreement with your doctor when the drug is prescribed about how to discontinue the treatment. In the case of more long-term treatment with opioids, your body will become accustomed to the drug (increased tolerance) and you will need a higher dose to achieve the same effect as before. This could lead to the development of physical and mental dependence on your medication.

To minimise the above risks, it is vitally important that you take your drug in the manner prescribed by your doctor and neither increase the dose on your own initiative, nor take the drug for longer than the agreed period. If your pain persists after the planned period of treatment, you can contact your doctor for advice.

Pregnancy/breastfeeding

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, it is important that you tell your doctor about this before you begin treatment.