

Post-operative pain control

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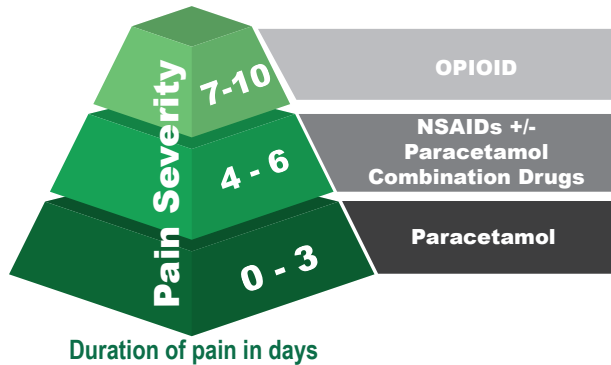
- ▶ Highlights the role of pain relief medications or pain relievers following surgery; and
- ▶ Provides important information on medication that you may be given.

You should read this information together with medicine product information.

Why treat pain after surgery?

Pain is often an inevitable consequence of surgery. Good pain control is not only important for your comfort, but it is also necessary for your recovery. It helps improve mobility and prevent problems such as blood clots and chest infection developing after surgery.

Pain Relief Ladder



Common painkillers

There are many different types of pain relief medications used in the management of pain. Your doctor may choose a combination of medications.

Paracetamol based medications

Paracetamol is used to prevent and treat mild to moderate pain. To maximise the effectiveness of paracetamol as a pain reliever, it should be taken regularly as prescribed rather than when you feel the pain.

Paracetamol may also be used to reduce the overall daily doses of pain medications and their side effects. Side effects of paracetamol are rare but if more than 4grams per day is taken, it can cause liver damage. It can be purchased without a prescription.

Opioids

This class of pain reliever is used to treat moderate to severe pain. Some preparations are:

- ▶ Immediate release (quick acting): take 4-6 hourly or as directed by the doctor when required.
- ▶ Slow release (long acting): take twice a day, morning and evening, 12 hours apart. (Slow release tablets should never be crushed or chewed.)

Never take both medications at the same time, allow a one hour gap between both.

Avoid alcohol whilst on these medications.

Tramadol is used to treat moderate to severe pain. Side effects include dizziness, sweating, dry mouth and nausea.

Oxycodone is used to treat severe pain. Side effects include constipation, nausea, headache and dizziness.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS)

Used to relieve pain and reduce inflammation. Side effects include stomach problems, indigestion, nausea, diarrhoea, skin rashes, headache and dizziness.

Examples include – celecoxib, diclofenac, ibuprofen, indomethacin, meloxicam and naproxen.

This medication must be taken with food and should be used with caution if you have asthma, gastric ulcers, hypertension and heart disease.

Do not take more than one drug from this category. Some of these are available for purchase without a prescription.

Dealing with side effects

- ▶ Lying down may help with dizziness and nausea.
- ▶ Take the pain relievers with food to help minimise nausea or indigestion.
- ▶ If any of your pain relievers make you feel sleepy or dizzy, do not drive or operate machinery.
- ▶ To prevent constipation, drink adequate amounts of fluids and eat plenty of fruit, vegetables and fibre. If constipation persists see your local pharmacist for treatment advice.

What is the best way to take these medications?

All pain relievers work best when preventing pain rather than treating the pain once it has already occurred.

Pain relievers may take up to one hour to have some effect on your pain, so you may need to plan your activities such as physiotherapy and take your pain relievers accordingly.

If you are in pain throughout the day, then take your medications regularly at evenly spaced intervals according to the directions.

How should I stop taking these medications?

As you recover, you will be able to reduce the amount of pain relief medications you take. Follow the advice of your doctor. Generally the stronger pain relievers are stopped first, then the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and lastly the regular paracetamol.

How long should I take the pain relievers for?

Take the pain relievers for as long as you have the pain and under the direction of your doctor.

If you require more medication, contact your GP.