

# How to Take Long-Acting Opioid Pain Medicine

## Palliative Care

Opioids are one type of medicine used to treat pain, or to help when feeling short of breath.

Opioids are available in short and long-acting forms. People taking long-acting pain medicine might also need short-acting pain medicine if they still have pain.

### What is a long acting pain medicine?

Long acting pain medicine is used for people who have pain all of the time. These medicines are released slowly into your body (over 12 to 24 hours).

It is important to take them at equally spaced times throughout the day and night. This helps to keep your pain under control.

For example:

- 'Every 12 hours' could be taken at 8:00<sup>AM</sup> and 8:00<sup>PM</sup>.
- 'Every 8 hours' could be taken at 6:00<sup>AM</sup>, 2:00<sup>PM</sup>, and 10:00<sup>PM</sup>.

### What is short-acting pain medicine?

Short-acting pain medicines are released into your body over 1 to 2 hours.

Use this medicine:

- at those times when you have more pain or feel short of breath,
- or**
- before an activity that causes extra pain or makes you feel short of breath

Sometimes a short-acting pain medicine is called 'breakthrough' pain medicine. This is because you take it when the pain 'breaks through' your regular pain medicine.

You might need to take 1 or 2 doses of breakthrough pain medicine a day. If you are more active, you might need to take more.

**Let your doctor or nurse know** if you need breakthrough pain medicine **3 or more times a day for 3 days in a row.**

Your regular pain medicine is:

(Name and amount)

Take it at these times:

Your breakthrough pain medicine is:

(Name and amount)

If needed, you can take it this often:

**Your doctor might change the amount and timing of your medicine. Use the most up-to-date directions from your doctor.**

### When do I take breakthrough pain medicine?

Take breakthrough pain medicine if your pain or breathing is making it hard for you to do your normal every day activities like: bathing, dressing, making meals, talking, shopping, or sleeping.

Take breakthrough pain medicine **30 to 60 minutes** before an activity that is painful or causes you to feel short of breath. This can help make the activity easier. It takes 15 to 30 minutes to start working and at least 60 minutes for it to give the most relief.

**Write down the times you take your breakthrough pain medicine.**

### What are the common side effects of opioid medicines?

The most common side effects of these medicines are:

- feeling sick (nausea) or throwing up (vomiting)
- hard and dry poop that is difficult to pass (constipation)
- sweating a lot
- feeling dizzy, sleepy, tired, or weak
- headache

All of these side effects can be helped. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about what to do to feel better.

**Do not** drive or work with machinery if you feel sleepy and/or dizzy.

### What happens if I miss a dose?

Anytime you miss taking a dose, speak to your pharmacist, nurse, or doctor about when to take your next dose. If you cannot reach them, call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 for advice.

**Do not** take 2 doses of pain medicine at the same time to make up for a missed dose.

### How do I take these medicines safely?

- ✓ Have one doctor write all of your prescriptions for pain medicine.
- ✓ Fill all prescriptions at one pharmacy.
- ✓ Take the medicine as directed.
- ✓ Always swallow long-acting pain medicines whole. Never crush or chew.
- ✓ **Do not** change the amount of medicine you take or how often you take it without talking to your doctor.
- ✓ Keep medicines out of sight and out of reach of children and pets. Lock them up if you can.
- ✓ Do not use old pain medicine that you might have left over. Return unused medicine to the pharmacy
- ✓ Never share your medicines with others. Do not borrow medicines from family or friends.

### Contact your doctor or nurse if:

- You are sleepier than normal, **or**
- Your family can't wake you up.

You do not need to live with pain. If you still have pain, please tell us. Sometimes it takes a few changes to find the right type and amount of pain medicine that will work for you.