

Do you take medication for chronic pain?

(also known as persistent or long-term pain)

Some of these drugs, called opioids may not be helping.

These may include:



Tablets: Morphine (Zomorph®), Oxycodone, Codeine, Tramadol

Patches: Buprenorphine, Fentanyl (Mezolar®)



Liquid: Morphine (Oramorph®)

Medicines generally, and opioids in particular, are not very effective at treating chronic pain. Opioids also have a number of side effects both short and long term:

- **Tolerance** — meaning you might need to take more of a medication for the same pain relief
- **Physical dependence** — this can include a strong desire to keep taking opioids or difficulty in controlling use. If you stop taking the drug suddenly, or lower the dose too quickly, you can get symptoms of withdrawal.
- **Increased pain sensitivity**
- **Constipation**
- **Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth**
- **Poor sleep, confusion and dizziness**
- **Depression**
- **Hormonal effects** - this can cause problems with fertility (difficulty getting pregnant), low sex drive, erectile dysfunction in men and irregular periods in women
- **Itching and sweating**

Opioids have a serious risk of addiction and overdose especially with prolonged use

If you would like to discuss your medication use

Please contact your GP practice who can help and advise you on ways to reduce your need for strong medicines and offer alternative treatments to help you manage your pain problems. They may refer you to another health-care professional e.g. pharmacist, nurse or physiotherapist or to a resource outside the practice.



How can you safely reduce / stop taking opioid medication

If you have been taking your opioid medicine for a long time, **do not stop taking it suddenly** as you may get unpleasant withdrawal side effects. **Contact your GP practice so a plan can be made with you to reduce your opioid gradually.**

It is important you don't take more opioid than the dose prescribed for you

Taking too much opioid medicine, whether intentional or not, is called an overdose. This can be very serious and may cause death.

Some of the signs that someone is experiencing an overdose include:

- feeling very sleepy or confused
- slurred speech and extreme dizziness
- difficulty breathing or no breathing

Your family, friends, and carers should know these signs so they can take immediate action.

If you think that you or someone else has taken too much of their opioid medicine, dial 999 immediately.

This has been adapted from Leeds CCGs Opioids for Persistent Pain - Patient Information Leaflet (2017)