

# Opioid medicines for short-term pain

Opioid medicines are used for severe pain, such as after an operation or serious injury. Opioids can cause serious side effects, so should only be used short-term.

## Examples of opioid medicines include:

- morphine
- oxycodone
- codeine
- tramadol



[www.healthify.nz/opioids](http://www.healthify.nz/opioids)

## How to take opioids



Opioids should only be used for the shortest amount of time, and at the lowest possible dose.



Follow the instructions on the label for how much to take and how often.



If you're also prescribed paracetamol or anti-inflammatories, you can use them with your opioid medicine. If you're unsure, ask your healthcare provider.

## As your body heals, you should take your opioid medicine less often



You should generally not take opioids for longer than a week.



Used long term, opioids increase your chances of side effects and can be addictive.



If your pain isn't improving, don't take any extra doses. See your healthcare provider for advice.

## While you are taking opioids



### Opioids can make you sleepy and affect your thinking and judgement

When taking opioids, it's recommended you:

- Don't drink alcohol.
- Don't drive a vehicle, ride a bike or operate machinery, including power tools.
- Take care with activities such as cooking.
- Don't make important personal or business decisions or sign legal papers.



### Be careful when taking the next dose

If you're drowsy or sleepy, don't take your next dose until you're wide awake and ask your healthcare provider for advice.



Common and serious side effects are listed on the next page

## While you are taking opioids (continued)



### Eat plenty of fibre and drink more water

It might be hard or painful to poo (constipation). If this happens, ask your healthcare provider for a laxative, to soften your poo.

Eating foods with fibre, drinking water and keeping active can help.



### Try other ways to manage your pain

Opioids reduce strong pain but won't take all of your pain away. Try relaxation techniques, gentle exercises and stretches.



### Tell all your healthcare providers you're taking opioids

Ask your doctor or pharmacist if it's safe to take any other medicines – especially those you take for pain, anxiety, sleep or depression. Opioids can affect some medicines.



### If you're breastfeeding

Most people can continue to breastfeed while taking opioids for pain relief. Let your doctors know you're breastfeeding so they can discuss this with you.

It's recommended you avoid co-sleeping with your baby when taking opioids. Put your baby to sleep in their own bed.



**Return any leftover opioids to your pharmacy for safe disposal**

## All medicines have some side effects

Opioid medicines can cause side effects, although not everyone gets them.

### Common side effects

Talk to your doctor if these side effects cause you problems or don't go away:

- feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting)
- itchy skin
- constipation.

### Serious side effects

Contact your healthcare team or Healthline on **0800 611 116** immediately if you notice these side effects and tell them you are taking opioids:

- feel very sleepy or have trouble staying awake
- have trouble breathing or are short of breath
- difficulty urinating (passing pee)
- stomach cramps or pain in the tummy area.



**Note:** Keep your opioid medicines in a safe place well out of reach of children and pets.