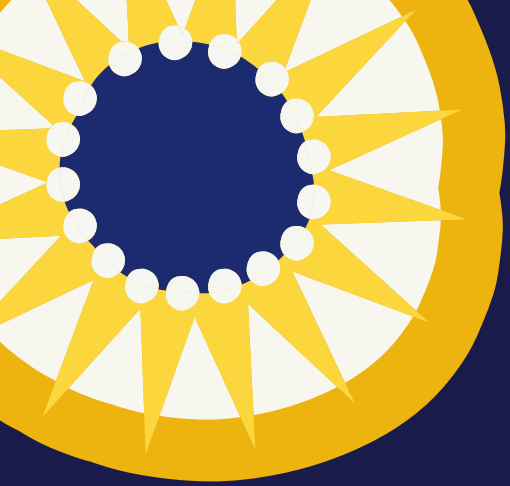




Understanding Morphine





This booklet is a general introduction to the use of morphine. It should not be used as a substitute for medical advice. You should get independent advice about your situation from the appropriate professionals. You may wish to discuss issues raised in this booklet with them.

STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

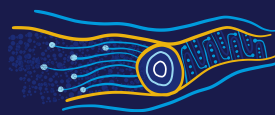
We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to the land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.



Respect



Journey



Guidance

This artwork was created for Cancer Council Queensland by Rachael Sarra, to celebrate, engage and strengthen relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Cancer Council Queensland.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that the following publication may contain images of deceased people.



Introduction

When you are in pain your doctor may provide you with medication to relieve or reduce your pain. Sometimes your doctor may order morphine when other pain relief medicines do not ease your pain.

Morphine is known around the world as one of the best ways to relieve pain. In this booklet, we look at the questions you may have when you first go on morphine.



What is morphine

Morphine is a pain relief medicine that can help to relieve:

1. Certain types of strong pain
2. Shortness of breath due to cancer or another disease

Morphine is used when pain feels very bad and you cannot ignore it or when medicines such as paracetamol (Panadol), ibuprofen (Brufen) and paracetamol and codeine (Panadeine) no longer ease the pain.

Where does morphine come from

Morphine comes from a plant called the opium poppy. Morphine is part of a family of medicines called opioids. Other opioids used for severe pain include codeine, oxycodone, hydromorphone, methadone and fentanyl.

Opioid medicines can come in different forms such as;

- a patch
- liquid medicine
- tablet
- injection



Side effects

As with all medicines, morphine can cause side effects. It can take a few days for your body to adjust to the strong medicine. You could have some of the following side effects. If you get any of these talk to your doctor, nurse or health worker.

Tiredness, confusion

At any time, but especially for the first few days when you start taking morphine or when your dose is increased you may feel sleepy or a little confused. You may forget where you put things or what you were going to say. Once your body adjusts, you may not feel as tired and/or confused.

If you are still tired and/or confused, let the doctor or one of the team looking after you know straight away. Letting your doctor know straight away you are still tired or confused will help them choose the dose of morphine that is best for you.

Nausea or feeling sick in the stomach and/or vomiting

Morphine can make you feel sick in the stomach or like you are going to vomit. This might also be caused by other things. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist can give you advice to help you stop feeling this way.

Constipation

It is common to have some trouble with your bowels or become constipated when you are taking morphine. In other words, it can be hard to do a poo when you are taking morphine. If you get constipated, let your doctor know straight away. The doctor may give you some extra medicine to stop you from getting constipated or ease your constipation.



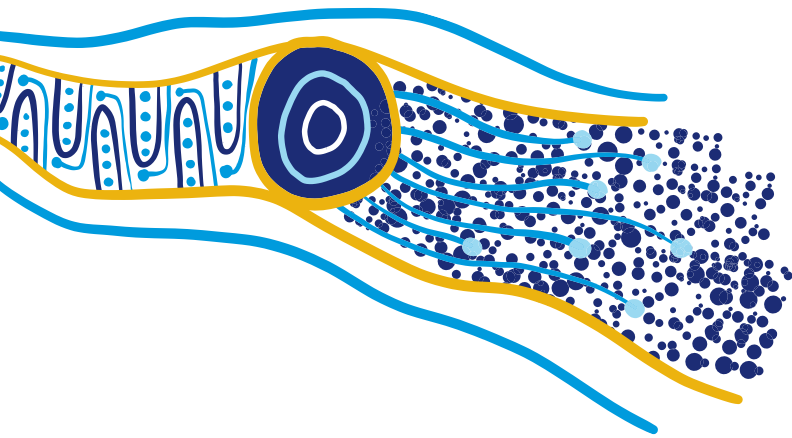
What does it mean if I have strong pain?

People at any stage of life can develop severe pain. Morphine is used to help stop or reduce pain when other pain medicines do not work. Although morphine is used for pain management in some circumstances during end-of-life care, it is also used to control pain in many other circumstances.

Doctors sometimes prescribe other medicines to use together with morphine to try and stop pain and other symptoms. If your pain improves you may be able to take a milder pain medicine, or you may be able to stop taking pain medicines all together. This should be a discussion between you and your doctor.

Will I become addicted to morphine?

It is possible to become addicted or “hooked” on morphine. This is why it is important that morphine is taken or given exactly as the doctor has prescribed. It is possible you could have physical withdrawal symptoms if morphine is stopped suddenly after you have been taking it regularly for some time. When your pain has reduced you should discuss with your doctor ways to reduce your dose of morphine safely.



Can I still drive while taking morphine?

When you take morphine, it slows down your reactions.

It is common to feel less alert when you first start taking morphine. Often you will be a little tired or not as fast with your thinking as when you are not taking morphine.

Do not drive unless you have checked with your doctor and your doctor says that it is okay for you to drive. It is against the law to drive if you cannot drive safely because of the effects of morphine on your mind and body.

Can I take other medication when I take morphine?

Some medicines and alcohol can cause or increase your chances of feeling sleepy when you are taking morphine. Let your doctor know all the medicines you are taking including any vitamins, herbs or bush medicines. The doctor will tell you whether these are safe to keep taking.

What dose of morphine will I be on?

Each person is different and will need to take different amounts of morphine. So that the doctor can do their best to help you, be honest about the pain you experience and tell the doctor what pain relief you have taken. The doctor can then work out the amount of morphine to match your needs. This may change over time.

What happens if my pain returns or becomes worse?

If your pain comes back or becomes worse, see your doctor straight away. Your doctor can look for reasons why the pain changed. To best manage your pain and any side effects, your doctor may increase the amount of morphine, or add another medicine. Do not take any extra tablets without seeing and talking to your doctor first.

What happens if my pain gets worse before I am due to take my next dose of morphine?

Let your doctor know straight away! This is so your doctor can look at your current medication and possibly adjust it to meet your needs. The doctor may give you a fast release morphine to stop this breakthrough pain until your dose of slow release morphine can be adjusted to suit your changing needs. Your doctor may also suggest that you take the fast release morphine before some activity such as having a shower to better manage your pain and enable you to do these activities.

If I whinge too much about pain am I a pest?

No! Nobody else knows your pain better than you do. You are the centre of all care. By telling your doctor you help them understand how you are feeling, what your side effects are, including where your pain is and how much pain you are in. This open communication allows you to participate in decision-making and allows your doctor to advise you on the most appropriate treatment.



Different preparations of morphine

Different preparations of morphine can be released into the body at different speeds. People sometimes talk about fast release and slow release morphine.

Slow release morphine

- May only need to be taken once every 12 or 24 hours.
- If you take slow release morphine as a tablet, do not chew, crush or break the tablets as this will affect how the medicine works and can be dangerous for you.
- Always swallow the slow release morphine tablets whole.
- If you have trouble swallowing the tablets let your doctor, nurse or health worker know.

Fast release morphine

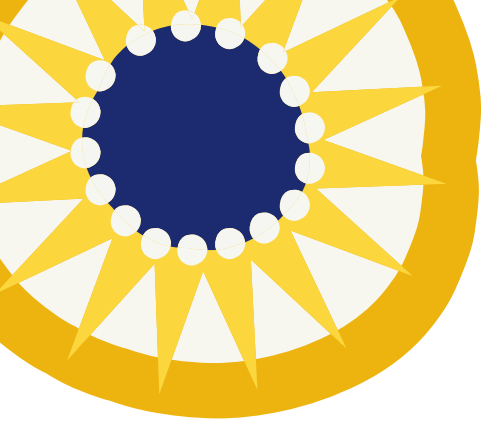
- Your doctor may also prescribe a fast release morphine
- This will be either as a tablet or liquid.
- You will take it if required in between your doses of slow release morphine if you have extra pain.
- This is also called a breakthrough dose.
- Keep a record of how much fast release morphine you take because if you need to take it regularly you may need a stronger dose of slow release morphine.
- You will need to see your doctor to adjust your dose.

Important things to remember when taking morphine

- Keep morphine tablets and packets in a safe place and out of reach of children and visitors. Nobody but you should take the morphine that has been prescribed for you.
- If your doctor has changed your dose of medicine, it is a good idea to write this down so you can remember the correct amount to take.
- Morphine can slow the rate of your breathing. For some people it makes their breathing more comfortable. If you or your family are worried about your breathing, talk to your doctor.
- Don't share medicine with family. If they are in pain or have run out of their medication, they need to see a doctor.

Can I take morphine just when I feel I need to?

No. For best management of your pain, take your pain medicine exactly the way your doctor has told you to take them. Taking morphine as prescribed will give you the best pain relief to match your needs and reduce side effects. **It is always important to discuss any changes with your doctor.**



What if I don't take the morphine the doctor has prescribed?

When you have been given morphine and do not take it when you are in pain, your pain will not ease and may get worse. This can be distressing for you and hard on your body.

Uncontrolled pain can:

- increase your blood pressure,
- stop you doing things you normally do,
- lead to depression or sadness,
- cause relationship difficulties (because you might get cranky easily), and
- make it hard for you to work and do things you enjoy.

Taking morphine as your doctor has prescribed will ease your pain and enable you to do things that are important to you.

What if I take too much morphine by accident?

If you take too much morphine, you will find that you feel sleepier and more confused. It can even cause serious problems such as slowing your breathing or loss of consciousness.

Your doctor should be told straight away so that it can be decided what action can be taken. The doctor will also let you know when to take your next dose of morphine. If you can't contact your doctor, or in an emergency, call 000.

Also, let someone close to you know so that they can check on you.

Further information

If you have any further questions or need more information on morphine or other medicines, talk to your doctor, nurse or health worker.

For general enquiries, you can contact:

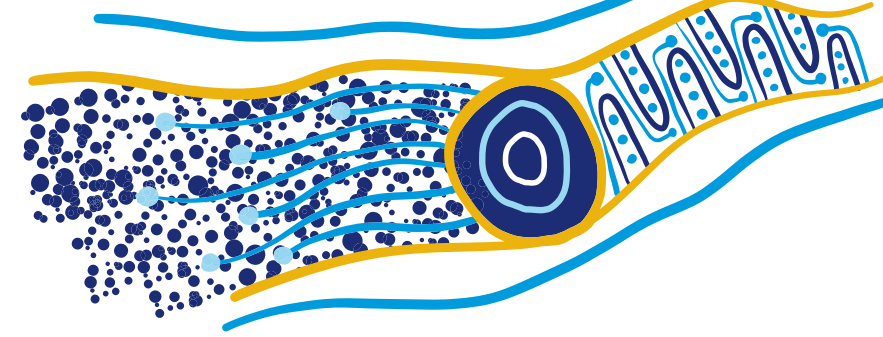
- **Cancer Council 13 11 20**, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm (excluding public holidays)
Our team can help provide you with cancer information, emotional and practical support.
- **PalAssist 1800 772 273**, 7am to 7pm 7 days
Is a free service for anyone who has a life-limiting illness or condition, and/or their families and carers.
- **Medicines line 1300 633 424** Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
A telephone service providing consumers with information on prescription, over-the-counter and complementary (herbal, 'natural', vitamin and mineral) medicines.



Keep your medicines list up-to-date

List ALL medicines currently used, including: prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs and bush medicines. Medicines come in many forms, including: tablets, liquids, inhalers, drops, patches, creams, suppositories and injections.

**Ask your health worker or your carer to fill in this form with you.
When you go back to your doctor, please take this with you.**



Name of medicine	What is medicine for?	How much do I use and when?	Special instructions e.g. take with food	Date started	Date to review



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