

A guide to fentanyl patches

Fentanyl patches are used to control ongoing moderate to severe pain. They are not used for pain that lasts for a short time.

Brand name: Durogesic®

How to use fentanyl patches

The fentanyl is inside a patch that is stuck on to the skin.

The medicine passes from the patch through the skin into the body. The patch is left on the body for 3 days in most patients.

When you first start using fentanyl it takes time to work. Your doctor will give you short acting medicine to take for pain if you need until your patch is working. You can also take the short acting medicine when you have pain while you are using the patch.

Always apply the patch regularly, and take short acting pain medicine as well if you need to.

If you need to take more than 2 to 3 doses of extra pain medicine a day, tell you're your health professional (eg doctor, nurse, pharmacist), as the dose of your fentanyl patch may need reviewing.

Some people find that doing certain things like walking or showering brings on pain. Tell your health professional who can advise you on the best way to manage this.

Applying the patch

- Clean the skin area with water only. Do not use soap, lotion oils or alcohol to the area where the patch will be applied.
- Write the date and time of application on the patch with permanent marker, then apply it to dry, hairless, non-irritated skin on the upper part of your body or upper arm.
- Any excess hair should be trimmed with scissors. Shaving may irritate the skin.
- Press the area with the palm of your hand for 30 seconds.
- Do not use if the patch is damaged or cut.
- Do not apply after a hot bath or shower.

Wearing the patch

- Check that the patch is still in place each day.

- Remove after 3 days (72 hours) and put a new patch on in a different place. Fold the old patch in half and dispose of in the garbage.
- After removing a patch, avoid exposing that area of skin to the sun for 2 days as it may be more sensitive.
- The patches are waterproof so you can have a shower or go swimming
- When wearing the patch, do not allow it to come into contact with direct sources of heat such as electric blankets, heat pads, heat lamps, saunas
- If the patch falls off or you forget to change it, stick a new one on as soon as you can. If you are very late changing your patch, you may need to take other pain relieving medicine until the fentanyl starts working again.
- If you develop a fever, try to keep your temperature down and contact your doctor or nurse if your temperature is 39 degrees or higher.

Fentanyl and addiction

You will not become addicted to fentanyl if you are taking it at the appropriate dose for your pain. If you are having other treatments for pain, such as radiotherapy, it may be possible to reduce the dose of fentanyl. Do not stop taking fentanyl suddenly, or you may get withdrawal symptoms such as chills, stomach pains or diarrhoea.

The amount of fentanyl needed for pain varies from patient to patient. People often stay on the same dose of fentanyl for a long time. Others find that their fentanyl dose needs to be adjusted. If your fentanyl dose needs to be increased it does not necessarily mean that your disease is worse.

Common side effects of fentanyl

- Drowsiness/Sleepiness - This is most common when you first use fentanyl or when the dose is increased. It should improve after a few days.
- Constipation - This is a common side effect but is preventable if you always take a laxative regularly as prescribed by your doctor. It is important to drink plenty of fluids.
- Nausea - You feel nauseated when you first start to use fentanyl. Your doctor may need to give you some medicine for a few days until nausea goes away.

Nausea, vomiting, and constipation are generally less than for other medications such as morphine.

Fentanyl patches can also cause rash; redness and itch at the patch site is usually mild and resolves when the patch is removed.

Some medicines, such as sedatives and ant-depressants, or alcohol may increase the side-effects of morphine. Ask your health professional for advice.

Fentanyl and driving

Fentanyl may impair your ability to drive. Generally, avoid driving when starting fentanyl, or when increasing the dose. Check with your health professional if you are unsure.

Although fentanyl is a very good pain killer, it is not helpful for all types of pain. Other treatments may be needed, and can be prescribed by your doctor if fentanyl is not controlling your pain, or is causing unpleasant side effects

The information provided in this leaflet is a guide only and it is important to ask your health professional if you have questions or concerns about the use of fentanyl.

*Developing the role of a pharmacist in community palliative care multidisciplinary teams project.
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