

A guide to oral hydromorphone

Hydromorphone is used for moderate to severe pain and cough

Brand names:

Short acting

Dilaudid® tablets

Dilaudid® oral liquid

Long acting

Jurnista®

How to take oral hydromorphone (hydromorphone taken by mouth)

- **Short acting** hydromorphone (Dilaudid®) is taken as needed, starts to work after about 30 minutes and works for up to 4 hours.
- **Long acting** hydromorphone (Jurnista®) is taken once every day, at around the same time each day.
- Long acting hydromorphone (Jurnista®) should be swallowed whole – **do not crush or chew**.
- Most patients will be ordered long acting hydromorphone and short acting hydromorphone. The long acting hydromorphone is taken to control ongoing pain, and the short acting hydromorphone is taken for breakthrough pain, that is, pain which occurs between the regular doses of long acting hydromorphone.
Always take the long acting hydromorphone regularly and take short acting hydromorphone as well if you need to.
Wait about 30 to 60 minutes after taking the extra dose of quick acting hydromorphone. If you still have pain, take a second dose.
- If you need more than 2 to 3 extra doses of short acting hydromorphone in a day, tell your health professional (eg doctor, nurse, pharmacist), as the dose of long acting hydromorphone may need reviewing.
- Some people find that things like going for a walk or showering brings on pain. Tell your health professional who can advise you on the best way to manage this.
- If you forget to take your long acting hydromorphone, take the missed dose as soon as you remember it. If it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and continue your regular schedule. Do not take a double dose. Remember that you can take a dose of the quick acting hydromorphone if you have pain.
- If you vomit and bring up your long acting hydromorphone, repeat the dose as soon as you feel better. If you are unsure, contact your health professional.

Hydromorphone and addiction

- You will not become addicted to hydromorphone 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 hydromorphone. Do not stop taking hydromorphone suddenly, or you may get withdrawal symptoms such as chills, stomach pains or diarrhoea.
- The amount of hydromorphone needed for pain varies from patient to patient. People often remain on the same dose of hydromorphone for a long time. Others find that their hydromorphone dose needs to be adjusted. If your hydromorphone dose needs to be increased it does not necessarily mean that your disease is worse.

Common side effects of hydromorphone

- Drowsiness/Sleepiness - This is most common when you first take hydromorphone or when the dose is increased. It should improve after a few days.
- Constipation - This is a very 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 - If you feel nauseated when you first start to take hydromorphone, try taking it with food. Your doctor may need to give you some medicine for a few days until nausea goes away.

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

Hydromorphone and driving

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

Although hydromorphone 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 hydromorphone 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 hydromorphone.

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

This project is an initiative of the Victorian Department of Health and is funded by the Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing, under the National Palliative Care Program.

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