

A guide to oral morphine

Morphine is used for moderate to severe pain. It is sometimes used for cough and to help breathlessness.

Brand names for morphine:

Short acting

Ordine® liquid
Sevredol® tablets
Anamorph® tablets

Long acting

MS Contin® tablets
MS Contin Suspension®
Kapanol® capsules
MS Mono® capsules

How to take oral morphine (morphine taken by mouth)

- **Short acting morphine** (Ordine®, Sevredol®, Anamorph®) is taken as needed, starts to work after about 30 minutes and usually works for up to 4 hours.
- **Long acting morphine** is taken regularly to control ongoing pain. Most long acting morphine is taken every 12 hours (MS Contin®). Take your morning dose when you wake up and then the evening dose 12 hours later. There is one type of long acting morphine that is taken once every 24 hours (MS Mono®). Kapanol® may be taken every 12 or 24 hours. MS Contin® must be swallowed whole – **do not crush or chew**. Long acting morphine capsules (Kapanol®, MS Mono) may be opened and the contents sprinkled on soft food or mixed with liquid. MS Contin Suspension® should be mixed thoroughly in water and taken immediately.
- Most patients will be ordered a long acting morphine and a short acting morphine. The long acting morphine is taken to control pain, and the short acting morphine is taken for breakthrough pain, that is, pain which occurs between the regular doses of long acting morphine.

Always take the long acting morphine regularly, and take short acting morphine as well if you need to.

Wait about 30 to 60 minutes after taking the dose of short acting morphine. If you still have pain, take a second dose.

- Some patients may not require long acting morphine, and take short acting morphine (Ordine® Anamorph® Sevredol®) only, for instance, to help with breathlessness.
- If you need more than 2 to 3 extra doses of short acting morphine in a day, tell your health professional (eg doctor, nurse, pharmacist), as the dose of long acting morphine may need reviewing
- Some people find that things like walking 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 morphine, take the missed dose as soon as you remember. 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 short acting morphine if you have pain.
- If you vomit and bring up your long acting morphine, repeat the dose as soon as you feel better. If you are unsure, contact your health professional.

Morphine and addiction

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

Common side effects of morphine

- Drowsiness/Sleepiness - This is most common when you first take morphine 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 morphine, 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 anti-depressants, or alcohol may increase the side-effects of morphine. Ask your health professional for advice.

Morphine and driving

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

Although morphine 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 morphine is not controlling your pain, or is causing unpleasant side effects.

The information 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 morphine.

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