

# Managing pain relief at home after surgery



James Paget  
University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

Author: Dr PL Nathan, Dr V Naik, Dr H Eid  
Consultant Anaesthetists, Department of Anaesthesia

**This leaflet explains what you can do to prepare for surgery with better pain control and to help your recovery. It describes the medicines used to reduce pain, and how to use them safely while you recover.**

Pain after an operation or surgery is normal. The amount of pain will vary on an individual basis. Acute pain after surgery may last up to three to seven days. Before discharge, you will be offered and advised on pain medicine to take at home. Your healthcare team will develop a plan that includes pain medicines you may already be taking.

The aim of pain control is to make it easier to cough, move, walk about and become steadily more active. These activities are vital to your recovery. Being active reduces the risk of complications such as chest infection or clots in the legs or lungs. It is normal to tolerate minor pain which is not limiting expected activity.

## Before your surgery

What can you do before operation to improve recovery after surgery?

- Be as active and fit as you can. This helps recovery to be quicker and assists with pain management sooner
- Regular gentle walking several times a day, water-based exercise and exercises done in your chair can all help build fitness. Pace these activities so as not to cause symptom flare ups.
- Eat healthily helps wounds to heal. Eat more healthy foods, like vegetables, fruit and protein rich food.
- Losing extra weight helps reduce many complications.
- Reduce or stop smoking and vaping. This helps lessen the risk of a chest infection, clots in the legs and lungs and other health issues that make your recovery tougher and longer.
- Reduce or stop alcohol. This can help the body recover faster after your operation.
- Use enjoyable distraction, mindfulness and relaxation to manage apprehension.

## What if you are already taking regular medicine for pain including opioids?

If you are already taking other pain killers and opioids, please inform your healthcare team. Depending on timing of your surgery, you may benefit from reducing your opioids beforehand in a safe manner. This may help with recovery after surgery, particularly in terms of your pain. If the interval for surgery is short, you should continue with all your pain related medicine up to the day of surgery. At the pre-operative assessment, we shall refer to the Pain Management Team who will advise further.

## After your surgery

A combination of different pain killers, taken regularly, usually provides very good pain relief in the days after surgery. Using a combination of drugs also reduces the likelihood and severity of common side effects such as nausea, sedation and indigestion.

Pain relief can be divided into 'regular pain relief' and 'rescue pain relief'.

## Regular pain relief medications

**Paracetamol** is an excellent pain relief medication that has very few side effects. It is usually the first choice of pain relief medication. You will be advised to take regularly six hourly (if you weigh 50kg & above) for two to five days.

**Anti-inflammatory medications (NSAID)** - Anti-inflammatory medications are usually used in combination with paracetamol and can provide good pain relief. Examples of anti-inflammatory medications include ibuprofen, diclofenac and naproxen. Dosage to be taken six to eight hourly regularly along with paracetamol for three to five days depending on expected pain and type of surgery.

You should not use anti-inflammatory medications if you have severe asthma, kidney problems, clotting disorders, are prescribed anticoagulants, or have a history of gastrointestinal bleeding/ulceration.

The above medication are available over the counter at local pharmacies, and can be well stocked at home in advance.

## Rescue pain relief

**Opioids** - Opioid medication are strong pain killers. Examples of opioids include codeine, dihydrocodeine, morphine and oxycodone.

Opioids should only be taken as an additional rescue pain medicine, when other regular pain medicines have not reduced the level of pain enough to allow you to comfortably able to do e.g. physiotherapy (for example; getting up and moving about.)

Common side effects of opioid medications include nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick), itching, constipation, drowsiness (excessive use can potentially cause dangerous drowsiness), hallucinations, and addiction.

Any remaining unused strong opioids should be returned to your usual community pharmacy.

## What can you do to reduce pain and recover well after your surgery?

- Remember to take pain medicines (such as paracetamol and ibuprofen) regularly, as advised.
- Learn to pace your activity. Try not to overdo things just because you're having a 'good day'.
- Steady pacing of activities is better. Choose activities that help build fitness and do them at regular intervals through the day.
- You'll be more likely to keep it up if you choose activities that you find are fun or rewarding.
- Always stop before you get overtired and remember to do enjoyable daily activities.
- Activity will help you distract yourself from the pain. For example you can go for gentle, regular walks, do enjoyable hobbies or crafts, indoor or garden activities (remember to do these within your recovery limits)

When recovering, as pain decreases, you should initially stop any rescue opioid, if taken. Thereafter non-opioids (NSAIDs followed by Paracetamol). If severe pain persists beyond a week, contact your GP seeking a review.

## More about opioids

Constipation is the most common side-effect of opioids. Useful ways to manage constipation:

1. Aim to drink plenty of fluids.
2. Eat foods that you know reduce constipation, such as figs, prunes, breakfast cereals, oranges, beans or pulses.
3. Take a laxative medicine every day, to help keep your bowels moving.

Stay safe while taking opioids after your surgery. You should not drive if your ability to do so is impaired. Always lock opioids safely away. Keep them away from children at all times. Start reducing opioids as your pain level improves and interferes less with the things you are trying to do. Never keep leftover opioids at home. Do not throw them in the bin. Always take unused opioids to your local pharmacy for disposal. Tell your carers to call 999 if they can't wake you up or if your breathing is very slow.

## Further information

[painconcern.org.uk](http://painconcern.org.uk)

[livewellwithpain.co.uk](http://livewellwithpain.co.uk)

[flippinpain.co.uk](http://flippinpain.co.uk)

[versusarthritis.org](http://versusarthritis.org)

### Your Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible - talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve it, then ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care.

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### OUR VALUES

#### **Collaboration**

We work positively with others to achieve shared aims

#### **Accountability**

We act with professionalism and integrity, delivering what we commit to, embedding learning when things do not go to plan

#### **Respect**

We are anti-discriminatory, treating people fairly and creating a sense of belonging and pride

#### **Empowerment**

We speak out when things don't feel right, we are innovative and make changes to support continuous improvement

#### **Support**

We are compassionate, listen attentively and are kind to ourselves and each other



The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

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