

# Pain control after breast cancer surgery information sheet



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## Introduction

After breast surgery you may experience discomfort or sensations such as tightness and numbness in the breast or under your arm. Research has shown that good control of your pain levels after surgery reduces your chance of developing long-term (chronic) pain. Everyone experiences pain differently, and some people need more pain relief than others. It is therefore important that the treatment of your pain is tailored to your personal needs.

## Common types of pain relief medication

Paracetamol can be used regularly to control mild to moderate pain.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as diclofenac or ibuprofen can be used to control moderate pain. NSAIDs must be used with caution by people with asthma, kidney disease, heartburn or stomach ulcers.

Opioids are strong painkillers used for severe pain. They include codeine and tramadol. Co-codamol and co-dydramol tablets are a combination of codeine and paracetamol.

## Pain during your hospital stay

Before your surgery, the nurse may give you some pain relief to take by mouth.

During your surgery, the anaesthetist (the doctor who looks after you in surgery) will provide pain relief into your bloodstream.

After surgery, your pain will be regularly assessed by the nursing staff to ensure you are receiving adequate pain relief. You should always tell a doctor or nurse if your pain worsens.

## Pain at home

When you are ready to go home, you will need to have a supply of painkiller tablets. You should obtain tablets such as paracetamol and ibuprofen yourself before your surgery. The hospital will also supply stronger painkillers for you to take home and to use if needed.

It is important that you take painkillers regularly following your surgery so that you are comfortable and not in pain. If your pain is well controlled after surgery, you are less likely to develop long-lasting (chronic) pain that can persist for months or years after your treatment has finished.

The information below will help you to decide which type of painkiller to take, based on the level of pain that you have.

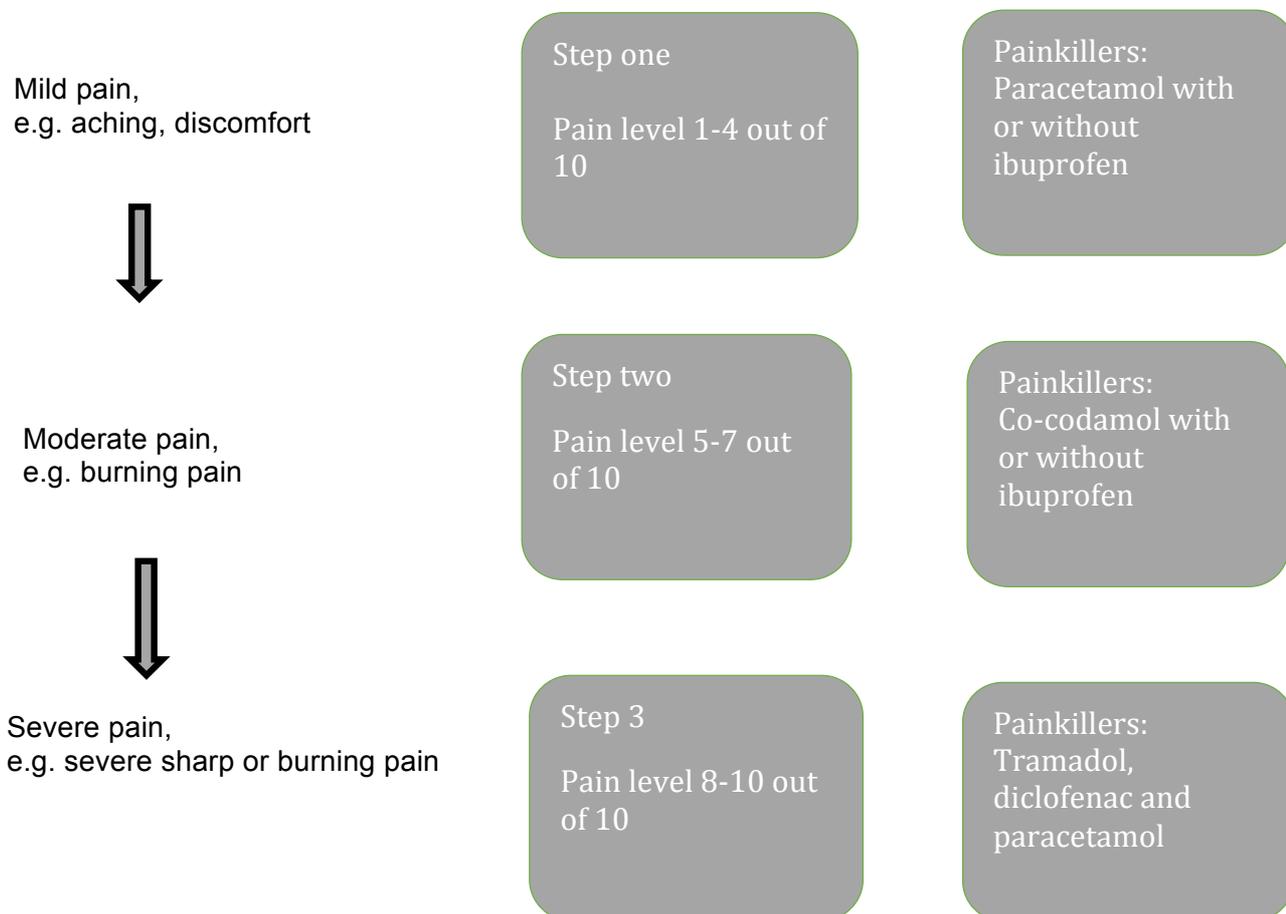
Remember that it is normal to experience pain after surgery, and we would expect you to require regular painkillers for a couple of weeks. However, if your pain is still not controlled on these tablets, please contact the Breast Care Nurses or your GP, as you may need to be seen and assessed to ensure there is no other cause for your pain.

## Assessing your pain

The diagram on the next page is a pain ladder. It will help you to decide which medication is suitable depending on the amount of pain you are in.

Start at the top of the ladder and move down until your pain matches the description given. Each medication can be taken in addition to each other. This means that when you move down one step you will continue to take the medication from the previous step; this way you are building up your level of pain control.

You will also be provided with a diary containing a visual scale to assess your levels of pain at home. Please fill this in accurately following your surgery and bring it with you to your post-operative appointment. This diary will also guide you as to which medication to take to control your pain.



## Contact Details:

Breast Care Nurse: 01493 452447

### Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible. Please talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve your concern, please ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care. **Before you leave the hospital you will be asked to complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.** Providing your feedback is vital in helping to transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

### Trust Values

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|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courtesy and respect</li> <li>• A welcoming and positive attitude</li> <li>• Polite, friendly and interested in people</li> <li>• Value and respect people as individuals<br/>So people feel <b>welcome</b></li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attentively kind and helpful</li> <li>• Look out for dignity, privacy &amp; humanity</li> <li>• Attentive, responsive &amp; take time to help</li> <li>• Visible presence of staff to provide care<br/>So people feel <b>cared for</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsive communication</li> <li>• Listen to people &amp; answer their questions</li> <li>• Keep people clearly informed</li> <li>• Involve people<br/>So people feel <b>in control</b></li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective and professional</li> <li>• Safe, knowledgeable and reassuring</li> <li>• Effective care / services from joined up teams</li> <li>• Organised and timely, looking to improve<br/>So people feel <b>safe</b></li> </ul> |  |  |



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.

**For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240**