

Taking opioids to treat breathlessness





Name of the healthcare professional who discussed this treatment with you:

This leaflet gives you general information about taking opioids for breathlessness. It does not replace the need for personal advice from a qualified healthcare professional. Please also speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about this medicine.

What are opioids?

Opioids are morphine-based drugs. Morphine is a strong painkiller.

Opioids are commonly used to treat moderate to severe pain. In small doses they are also used to treat long-term breathlessness. Opioids have been used as a treatment for breathlessness for many years. They are proven to be effective and safe.

Opioids should make your breathing feel easier and you may also feel more relaxed. If you feel that there is no improvement in your breathing, please tell your doctor as opioids do not work for everyone.

The opioids that are most commonly used for breathlessness are:

- Oramorph[®] – liquid morphine.
- OxyNorm[®] – liquid/capsule oxycodone.

How should I take opioids?

Opioids can be taken in different ways. Your doctor may tell you to take opioids:

- regularly
- as needed
- before activities that may cause breathlessness.

Oramorph[®]/OxyNorm[®] should work within 30 minutes of taking them.

The dose of
Oramorph[®] (10mg
in 5ml) / OxyNorm[®]
(5mg in 5ml) *[delete
as appropriate]*
prescribed for you is: _____ mg

This measures: _____ ml

The maximum dose
you should take in
24 hours is: _____ mg

You should use an oral syringe to measure your opioid dose. If you have not been given an oral syringe, please ask your local pharmacist.

Further instructions:

Are there any side effects?

Yes, but only some patients suffer from side effects. Common side effects include:

- feeling sick
- constipation
- dry mouth
- drowsiness
- itching.

If you are concerned about any possible side effects, or experience any side effects, please speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Frequently asked questions

Can I drive while taking opioids?

You may be able to drive if you have been on the same dose for five days and are not feeling drowsy. You should not drive if the opioids make you feel drowsy. Please discuss this further with the healthcare professional who prescribed the opioids for you.

Can I drink alcohol while taking opioids?

You may have a small glass of wine, beer, sherry or whisky. However, it is best to avoid drinking more than this as you may become very drowsy.

Can I get addicted to opioids?

The amount of opioid used to treat breathlessness should not cause addiction. However, you can become tolerant to the opioid, so it is important that it is gradually stopped if it does not benefit you, or if you no longer need it.

I thought opioids were only used when patients are at the end of life?

Opioids are used to treat severe pain at any stage of life. Opioids can also be used safely for other reasons, including for treating breathlessness.



Isn't oxygen used to treat breathlessness?

Oxygen is used to correct low oxygen levels and reduce the strain on your heart and lungs. However, you can have normal oxygen levels and still be very breathless, which is why we use other treatments such as opioids.

The leaflet in the medicine package says that you should not take Oramorph[®]/OxyNorm[®] if you have breathing problems – why have I been given it?

This is only a potential problem if you need to take very large doses of these opioids to treat pain. You have been given a very low dose as it is being used to treat breathlessness, not pain. Your doctor has carefully prescribed the right opioid and dose for you. Please speak to your doctor if you have any further concerns.

Who can I contact for advice?

Pharmacy patient helpline

Tel: **020 7351 8901**

Monday–Friday, 9am–5.30pm

Harefield Hospital

Lung transplant supportive care

Tel: **07967 004 815**

Supportive and palliative care

Tel: **01895 828 922**

Monday–Friday 8.30am–4.30pm

Royal Brompton Hospital

Supportive and palliative care

Tel: **020 7352 8121** extension **4136**

Monday–Friday 8.30am–4.30pm

You can also contact your GP if you have questions about your medicines.

If you have concerns about any aspect of the service you have received in hospital and feel unable to talk to those people responsible for your care, call the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on:

- Royal Brompton Hospital – 020 7349 7715
- Harefield Hospital – 01895 826 572

You can also email pals@rbht.nhs.uk. This is a confidential service.



A lifetime of specialist care

Royal Brompton Hospital

Sydney Street

London

SW3 6NP

tel: 020 7352 8121

textphone: (18001) 020 7352 8121

Harefield Hospital

Hill End Road

Harefield

Middlesex

UB9 6JH

tel: 01895 823 737

textphone: (18001) 01895 823 737

website: www.rbht.nhs.uk

فورية لمضمون هذه الوثيقة إلى اللغة العربية، يرجى منك الاتصال بأحد
ستشفانك. أحد موظفينا سيسعى لترتيب إجراءات الترجمة وإتمامها في

Brosurteki bilginin Türkçe tercumesi için
tedavi görüyor olduğunuz bölüme bas
vurunuz. Bölüm personeli tercümenin
gerçekleşmesini en kısa zamanda
ayaracaktır.

January 2018

© Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Foundation Trust