Managing your pain after leaving hospital

Anaesthesia & Perioperative Medicine

Information for patients, families and friends

This leaflet explains how to manage your pain at home after your procedure. It contains information about commonly used pain-relieving medications (analgesics) as well as other methods to control pain.

Why is treatment of pain important after surgery?

- Good pain control helps you to be more comfortable while you recover after surgery. This helps you to move and breathe more easily which assists recovery.

How do I know when to treat my pain?

- The amount of pain after an operation depends on the type of surgery and will vary from person to person.
- It is likely that you will have some pain after you go home although this is not normally severe.
- During the first few days after surgery, you may need to take stronger pain killers. The need for these will lessen as the body heals.
- Take pain relief about an hour before planned activities that may cause discomfort (e.g. showering).
- It is important to let the doctors and pharmacist know of all the medications (including painkillers) you are taking prior to your surgery.

Do not wait until your pain worsens before taking pain relief. Pain is easier to control when it is mild.

Which pain relieving medication should I take?

You will be prescribed a combination of pain relief to be taken depending on the severity of the pain you experience.

1. Paracetamol – take for any pain then stop last.
   - A safe and effective painkiller, take paracetamol regularly three or four times daily with or without any other stronger pain relieving medications.
   - Side effects are uncommon but too much paracetamol is dangerous. Many other cold and flu brands contain paracetamol – do not take these.
2. Anti-inflammatory – take for moderate pain then stop before paracetamol.
   - There are many different anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). If approved by your surgeon these can be taken regularly or as required – always with food or straight after food.
   - Usually anti-inflammatories will not be prescribed if you have a history of stomach ulcers, allergy to aspirin or NSAID drugs or are pregnant or breastfeeding. Caution is required in patients with asthma, bleeding disorders, heart or kidney failure and in those taking anticoagulant (blood thinner) medications.

3. Tramadol or oxycodone – take for moderate to severe pain then stop first.
   - These opioid (morphine-like) medicines should only be taken when required and as prescribed. Only a small quantity is dispensed for a short-term use after surgery.
   - All opioids can cause side effects including constipation, nausea, dizziness, confusion and drowsiness. Tramadol may rarely cause seizures and should be avoided in epilepsy.
   - It is important to remember that opioids may interact with other drugs and increase the effect of sedatives and alcohol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pain Severity</th>
<th>Pain Score*</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mild pain</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>Paracetamol – start this first and stop last</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate pain</td>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>As for mild pain and add anti-inflammatories or tramadol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe pain</td>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>As for moderate pain and add oxycodone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pain is scored on a scale from zero to 10. Zero is “no pain” and 10 is “worst pain imaginable”.

It is possible that you will also have local (numbing) anaesthetic administered to keep you more comfortable on the day of the surgery. Take your first pain relief tablets before the local anaesthetic wears off or before going to bed so that they are working overnight.

Tell your surgical team about any pain that is getting worse despite pain relief medicine.

What non-drug methods can I use to treat my pain?
   - Adequate rest
   - Gentle activity
   - Keep your leg or arm raised as much as possible after surgery
   - Adequate fluid intake
   - Ice packs
   - Supporting the wound if you cough or sneeze
   - Gentle stretch or massage for muscle pain (if approved by your surgeon)

Do not mix and match pain relieving medications from hospital and from home. Only take those that have been prescribed for you on discharge.