

# Appendix 16 – Stopping Your Medicine – Opioids Used for Persistent Pain Patient Information Leaflet



Greater Manchester  
Integrated Care  
Wigan Locality

## Stopping Your Medicine: Opioids used for Persistent Pain

### What are opioids, and why are they used?

Opioids are considered to be some of the strongest painkillers available and are used to treat pain after surgery, serious injury and cancer.

Opioids provide pain relief by acting on areas in the spinal cord and brain to block the transmission of pain signals and are very good at treating short term pain and cancer pain.

We used to think opioids helped persistent pain (pain that lasts for longer than 3 months, sometimes called chronic pain) but we now know opioids are not very good at treating this type of pain.

Sadly we now know that most persistent pain can not be cured. This does not mean that things can't change or improve and many people have found a way forward by self management and non-drug treatments such as exercise and talking therapies..

### What are the long term risks of taking opioids?

Opioids may cause significant problems, which include:

- ◆ Falls
- ◆ Confusion/memory loss
- ◆ Lack of sex drive
- ◆ Increased levels of pain
- ◆ Withdrawal
- ◆ Affect your ability to drive safely
- ◆ Weight gain
- ◆ Sleep problems
- ◆ Difficulty breathing at night
- ◆ Addiction and dependence
- ◆ Death



### What are the benefits if I stop taking an opioid?

If you have used your opioid for a long time and the medicine is not managing your pain it you should speak to your doctor about stopping it.

You may become, or may have already become, dependent on it. If you stop, you will have fewer side effects, so you will be:

- ◆ More alert and able to concentrate
- ◆ Less likely to have an accident such as a fall or car accident
- ◆ Less likely to feel fatigue or have poor sleep
- ◆ Improved mood



### Self Management

Self management is about shrinking the part of your life that is about pain and growing the other parts of your life, so that pain no longer dominates.

Sleep—many people find that poor sleep makes their pain worse

Retrain your brain—you can actually retrain your brain to turn the pain down

Learning to accept and live with your pain is difficult but can help in the long run.

Live well with pain is a website with lots of tools to help you manage your pain [Home - Live Well with Pain](#)

Live Well  
with pain

## How should I stop taking my Opioid?

### 1. Do NOT stop taking your medicine suddenly

You should discuss stopping your medicine with your doctor, pharmacist or practice nurse to make sure that you reduce your dose slowly. Different people will need to reduce their dose at different speeds. Once you have decided to stop, it is important that you make this a slow gradual process, as this will give you a better chance of long-term success. It is important that you take it at your own pace – one that feels right for you.

### 2. Plan how you will reduce and stop

Your doctor, pharmacist or practice nurse will give you advice on how you should reduce the dose of your medicine and help you think about other ways of dealing with your pain. Most people find that about two to four weeks between each dose reduction works for them, but everyone should find their own level.

### 3. Follow the self care advice your doctor gives you.

**The Good Relaxation Guide** - a guide to help you deal with tension, worry and difficult situations.

**The Good Sleep Guide** - which gives practical advice on how to develop a regular sleeping pattern.

**Ten Footsteps** — a guide to living well despite your persistent pain.

**Regular exercise** - can improve pain



### 4. Keep a diary

Keeping a diary can help as it records your progress and achievements. This will give you more confidence and encouragement to carry on.

### 5. Don't go back!

When people begin to reduce their dose, they often become more able to deal with normal day-to-day events and may feel much better. However, it is also common to have a bad patch at some time during the process. If you feel you are going through a bad patch, stick with the current dose until you feel ready to reduce again; this may take several weeks but it is important that you take it at your own pace. Any reduction in dose is a step in the right direction.

### 6. Be aware of possible withdrawal effects


If your medicine is reduced slowly it is unlikely that you will have any withdrawal effects, but it is a good idea to be aware of possible withdrawal symptoms. These could include: aches and pains; sinus problems; stomach and bowel problems; sleeping problems; restlessness, irritability, anxiety. If you do experience any of the side effects these usually only last for a few days to a few weeks. Speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you need help managing your withdrawal symptoms

**With time these symptoms should pass - don't give up - good luck!**

*Adapted from Live Well with Pain and All Wales Medicines Strategy Group: Hypnotic and Anxiolytic reduction or withdrawal resources; and Wigan Borough CCG: Opioids for Persistent Pain PIL, with permission and thanks.*

If you would like this leaflet in a different language or format (including Braille or Easy Read), please contact us at:

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