

Appendix 18 – Letter Suggesting Drug Holiday

[Practice name]

[Address]

[Tel]

[Fax]

[Email]

[Date]

[Title/Initial/Surname]

[Patient Address Block]

Dear [Title] [Surname]

You have been given this information sheet because you have been taking painkillers for a time. We are particularly talking about painkillers in the opioid class like co-codamol, co-dydramol, codeine and dihydrocodeine.

Recent medical evidence questions the benefit of drugs like this (which are in the morphine family) for long-term pain. Strange as it might sound – we don't think they are very good at killing pain at all when taken for more than a few months.

There are some risks too – they can

- sometimes make pain worse
- cause side effects to the intestines and the stomach
- make the body feel dependent on them so if you miss a dose you feel a bit jittery and anxious
- increase the risk of falls
- there's even a risk of overdose and death, especially if taken in overdose with alcohol or benzodiazepines like diazepam.

For these reasons we suggest you try a “drug holiday” This means you taper off and stop your painkillers over a month or so to see for sure whether they're helping or not. It's not unusual for pain to flare up a bit when doses are reduced and discontinued but that's to be expected. Once you're off them for a month, you'll have a good idea as to whether they're making a positive difference to your life. If they are, feel free to restart them – try to find the lowest dose that works.

If you've got any questions about this, feel free to make an appointment with a doctor of your choice to discuss.

Best wishes and good luck!

Medical Team