This information is for those people using opioid pain killers.

What are opioid medications?

They are powerful pain-relieving medications. They are useful when other pain killers are not effective.

Are there different types of opioids?

There are different types of drugs in this group. Some examples are below:

- Codeine
- Dihydrocodeine
- Tramadol
- Tapentadol
- Morphine
- Oxycodone
- Buprenorphine,
- Fentanyl
- Methadone. Their strength varies depending on the drug and the dose.

Are opioids the best pain killers?

Opioids are very strong pain killers, but are not suitable for all types of pain. Some pains (e.g. nerve pain) are better treated with other pain killers e.g Amitriptyline, Gabapentin (on their own or in addition to opioids).
Will these medications take away my pain completely?

The aim of the treatment is to reduce the pain so that you can do more of your daily activities, not to take away the pain completely. These medications are commonly used with other pain killers to reduce side effects.

What are the ways that I can take opioids?

They can be taken in different forms - liquids, tablets, slow release tablets and skin patches. Your healthcare team will prescribe you the best type based on your condition and pattern of pain.

Each preparation has advantages and disadvantages. For example patches provide a steady dose of the drug through the skin and are therefore suitable for constant background pain. However they are not suitable if your pain comes in short bursts.

Are these drugs safe to use?

Opioids are safe to use when taken with the guidance of a qualified healthcare professional. Care must be taken to use only the prescribed dose and to keep these medications away from children.

Are there any dangerous side effects?

The commonest side effects of these medications are dizziness, sickness, sleepiness, confusion, itching, alterations in mood, constipation, weight gain and reduced sexual drive. A more dangerous side-effect is decreased breathing. If the side effects become intolerable your health care team might suggest alternate opioid drugs or a different preparation.

For any further information, please contact drug information 020 8725 1759.

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