

Oral Opioid Medicines



Opioids are strong pain relievers. These medicines are very useful but can be dangerous if not used safely. It is very important that you use these medicines only as directed by your doctor, and avoid consuming alcohol.

Never give these medicines to others. When they are no longer needed, return unused medicines to your local pharmacy.

Types of oral opioid medicines

Commonly prescribed oral opioids include **oxycodone, morphine and tapentadol (see table below)**. These may be supplied in different forms, including immediate-release or slow-release tablets, or an oral liquid. You may be prescribed more than one type of product.

Immediate-release products release the medicine into your body quickly. Each dose will usually provide pain relief for 4 to 6 hours. You may be instructed to take this medicine only when needed.

Slow-release* products release the medicine into your body slowly, usually over 12 hours or longer. These products are taken until your pain is under control, then will usually be reduced and stopped. If you were started on these products while in hospital, speak to your GP after discharge about your ongoing plan. Slow-release products must never be split, crushed or chewed.

Side effects of opioid medicines

Potential side effects vary and could depend on your dosage. Some side effects can be very serious, especially if you take large doses or take them with other medicines that can make you drowsy. Side effects may include:

▶ Nausea or vomiting

This may be prevented by taking these medicines with food. Your doctor may prescribe medication to help.

▶ Constipation

You may need to take laxatives such as Coloxyl with Senna[®] to help keep your bowels moving. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about which laxative is best for you.

▶ Other side effects, such as confusion, itching, drowsiness, dizziness, sweating, or difficulty passing urine.

If any of these side effects worry you, speak to your doctor. Excessive drowsiness or very slow breathing can be very serious (see below).

Make sure you and your family know how to recognise serious side effects

▶ **Over-sedation** (difficulty staying awake, or inability to be woken easily)

▶ **Respiratory depression** (very slow, shallow or difficult breathing)

If these effects occur, do not take any more medication, and get medical help as soon as possible.

The table below lists examples of oral opioid products that you may have been prescribed:

	Immediate-release	Slow-release*
Oxycodone	Endone [®] tablets, Oxynorm [®] capsules or liquid	Oxycontin [®] tablets, Targin [®] tablets
Morphine	Ordine [®] oral liquid	MS Contin [®] tablets or granules
Tapentadol	Palexia <u>IR</u> [®] tablets	Palexia <u>SR</u> [®] tablets

*Slow-release products may also be called 'modified-release', 'controlled-release' or 'prolonged-release' medicines