

## Pain Management After Surgery

Royal Hospital for Women

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This factsheet is available to help you understand:

- Different types of medication that you may be asked to take to help manage your pain
- Which pain relief medicine you may have been given to take home
- How to take those medicines and their common side effects

Everybody's experience of pain is different. The medicine you are asked to take will be just for you according to:

- The type of surgery you had (i.e. laparoscopy or laparotomy)
- The amount of pain you are experiencing
- Whether or not you are taking other medicines

Whilst taking the pain relief medicines described in this leaflet, you should not take any other pain medicine unless you have had this explained by your nurse, family doctor/GP or your specialist.

There are three common types of pain relieving medicines:

- Simple pain relief, e.g. paracetamol
- Anti-inflammatories, e.g. ibuprofen, diclofenac
- Opioids, e.g. tramadol, oxycodone

These common types of medications are sometimes used on their own or sometimes used together. When used together, at low doses, they can provide better pain relief and reduce the likelihood and severity of side effects. Pain medicines are usually given as a regular dose, with additional medicine when required if you still have pain (known as "breakthrough pain").

### AFTER LEAVING HOSPITAL

You will be given advice regarding your specific post-operative pain requirements, however, as a general rule you should take paracetamol and/or anti-inflammatory medications on a regular basis and only take opioids for "breakthrough pain". ALL these pain medications should be gradually reduced over a period of one to two weeks.

If you experience severe or unusual pain after you leave hospital you should contact your doctor straight away.

A tick in the box indicates a medicine you have been asked to take

### SIMPLE PAIN RELIEF

- Paracetamol** (common brand names: *Panadol* or *Panamax*) is a mild pain relief medicine and is well-tolerated with few side effects when used in the right doses.

**The recommended dose is 1g (i.e. two 500mg tablets or caplets) every six hours (four times a day). Do not take more than 8 tablets (= 4g paracetamol) in 24 hours.**

While taking regular paracetamol, you should not take any other medicine (e.g. over-the-counter medicine) containing paracetamol, e.g. cold and flu tablets or other brands of paracetamol.

## ANTI-INFLAMMATORY MEDICATION

Anti-inflammatory medicines help to reduce pain due to inflammation and swelling. You can take either diclofenac or ibuprofen, but not both at the same time. Although usually well-tolerated, they can cause indigestion, heartburn, reflux, diarrhoea or abdominal pain in some patients. In a small number of patients with asthma, they can increase wheeziness. Where possible, these medicines should be taken with or soon after food.

- **Diclofenac** (common brand name: *Voltaren*) is a strong anti-inflammatory.

***The recommended dose is 50mg (one tablet) every eight hours (three times a day).***

- **Ibuprofen** (common brand names: *Nurofen*, *Advil* or *Brufen*) is another anti-inflammatory used as an alternative to diclofenac. It is slightly less potent, but milder on the stomach.

***The recommended dose is 200mg-400mg (one-two tablets) every eight hours (three times a day).***

## OPIOIDS

Opioids are stronger pain relieving medicines used for moderate to severe pain. You are asked to take them when pain is not controlled with other medicines. Common side effects which may occur include dizziness, nausea and vomiting, confusion, constipation and drowsiness. Due to the sedating effect, it is not advisable to drink alcohol or drive a vehicle while taking any of these medicines. Laxatives may be required if you experience constipation.

- **Tramadol** (common brand names: *Zydol*, *Tramedo*, *Tramal*) is a moderate to strong pain medication.

***The recommended dose is 50-100mg (one-two tablets) up to four times a day when required for moderate to severe pain.***

- **Oxycodone** (common brand names: *Endone* or *OxyNorm*) is a strong pain medicine similar to morphine. Side effects are more common with this medicine, and therefore you should take it only for short periods, as required, for breakthrough pain. If it is used for relief of breakthrough pain, regular pain medicine should be continued and oxycodone added to 'top-up' your pain relief when required.

***The recommended dose is 5-10mg (one-two tablets or capsules) up to four times a day when required for severe pain.***

## FURTHER INFORMATION:

If you require any further information, you can speak to your specialist, local doctor, local community pharmacist or hospital pharmacist.