

# Opioid Awareness

## Mid Ulster Health Care

### Patient Information Leaflet (August 2023)

Acute pain is the body's normal response to obvious injury. While severe, acute pain is usually short term and will resolve in a matter of days or weeks.

Persistent pain is described as pain that continues for 3 months or more and may not respond to standard treatment. Patients may experience low mood, irritability, poor sleep and reduced ability to move around which can impact on their quality of life.

**Medication only plays one part in pain management.** A complete reduction in pain should not be expected from medication alone, with a 30% reduction in pain considered a good outcome in most patients.

Self - management of pain empowers patients to improve their quality of life, reduce the burden of medication and therefore reduce the risks and side effects associated with long term use of opioids.

Opioids are strong painkillers used in the treatment of moderate to severe pain. Examples include morphine, fentanyl, oxycodone, codeine, tramadol and buprenorphine. The aim of treatment is to reduce your pain enough to help you get on with your life.

Opioids should be used at the lowest effective dose on a short term basis. Their continued use should be reviewed with your Primary Care team with an aim to reduce and stop these medications. Many people find they can reduce their opioid dose without an increase in their pain. Long term use is associated with short term and long term side effects and an increased risk of addiction. It is important to consider the potential side effects of opioid use and they need to be balanced with potential benefits.

Common short term side effects include;

- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Feeling sleepy
- Confusion



These side effects usually resolve after a few days.

Long term use is associated with:

- Hormone changes – this can cause problems with fertility, low sex drive and irregular periods and weight gain
- Reduced ability to fight infection
- Memory problems – this can lead to memory loss, mental foginess and reduced energy levels.
- Tolerance – your body can get used to opioids over long periods of time so you may have to take higher doses to obtain the same effect
- Addiction



Before starting opioid treatment, it is essential that you understand the aims of the therapy, continue to use self-care strategies and have sufficient practical support to enable you to adhere to the Treatment Plan.

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## **What else can I do?**

Opioids work best if you combine them with other ways of managing your symptoms such as regular exercise and doing enjoyable activities such as work, study or social activities.

Setting goals to help improve your life is an important way to see if opioids are helping. Try to set small achievable goals that may have a positive impact on your life.

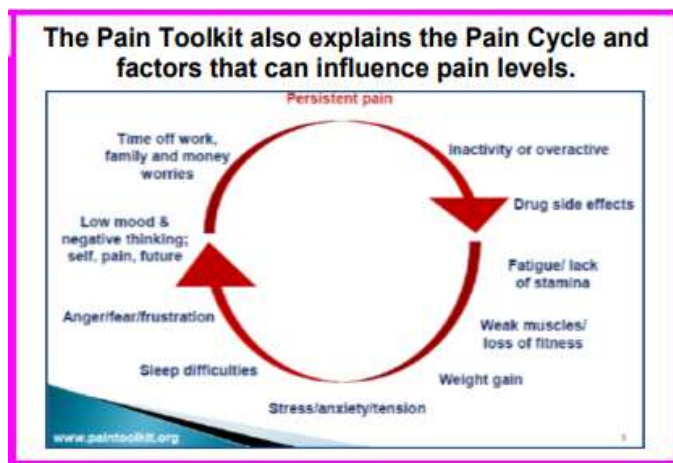
## **Where can I find further information?**

There are many resources available to patients to aid self- management. The pain toolkit discusses the pain cycle and provides practical information for patients in the form of 12 simple tools or steps to aid relief.

<http://www.pain toolkit.org/>

Another excellent online resource is the Live Well With Pain website.

<http://livewellwithpain.co.uk/>



Patients with arthritis can register for free self- management courses throughout Northern Ireland that provides practical help and peer support to patients and aids you to make positive changes to your lifestyle. Register FREE by calling 02890782940 or email: [Nireland@versusarthritis.org](mailto:Nireland@versusarthritis.org).