

### **Is there a maximum dose?**

No. Morphine is unusual in that there is no maximum dose. If it is taken for pain as prescribed, the dose can be increased gradually to match your pain. Often, people can be on very big doses of morphine for a long time, with no significant problems.

### **What about morphine for breathlessness?**

If there is no obvious treatable cause of breathlessness there are several ways in which breathing can be made easier, such as a low dose of morphine. It reduces the feeling of breathlessness that you have without removing the real cause. It “masks” the cause and helps you to feel better and more relaxed. There are also other medicines which may help.

### **If I take morphine for pain, why do I need other painkillers?**

Although morphine works well on many types of pain, some sorts of pain need different painkillers. You may need to take several different types of medicines to manage your pain. We can also give painkillers in a number of different ways. For example, some can be supplied as a patch that sticks to the skin or as a dissolvable tablet or spray to use in the mouth.

### **Does taking morphine mean I am near the end of life?**

No. Many people think that morphine is only given near the end of life; this is not true. You are given morphine to relieve strong pain. Your doctor will explain the reason they are prescribing morphine. If you have any doctors at all then just ask.

### **Does morphine make death come sooner?**

No. Morphine is often prescribed in the advanced stages of illness to help pain or breathlessness and maintain comfort up to the time of death. There is no evidence to suggest that opioids such as morphine hasten the dying process when used at the right dose to control symptoms. The person declines because of the illness with or without morphine. A person receiving regular morphine in their final hours will always have a last dose. To the family at the bedside, this may seem to cause or contribute to the death, especially if death occurs within a few minutes. However, the drug does not cause the person to die, it is simply the last medicine given before natural death occurs.

If you have any more questions about morphine or other medications, please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

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## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MORPHINE**



## **What is Morphine?**

Morphine is a strong painkilling drug. It works very well on many types of pain, although it is commonly associated with cancer pain. It is also sometimes used to control feelings of breathlessness.

Morphine belongs to a group of painkillers called opioids. Morphine is the most commonly used opioid, but there are also several others, for example codeine, oxycodone or fentanyl. These can be as effective as morphine but occasionally one may suit a particular pain or patient more than another.

## **How to I take morphine?**

Morphine can be given in several ways. It's available as a simple tablet or liquid which work for about four hours but as well as these, there are slow-release tablets or capsules that last for 12 or even 24 hours, so that you might only have to take one or two a day. For people with swallowing difficulties, slow-release morphine is also available in granules.

## **If I take morphine, will I get addicted to it?**

It is possible to become addicted to morphine, but this is rare if you are taking it to relieve cancer pain and your doctor is reviewing your treatment regularly.

It is quite normal for the dose to increase over time, although many people remain on a stable dose for long periods. As with other medicines, you should not stop taking

morphine suddenly without discussing this with your doctor or nurse, as your body needs time to adjust.

## **What happens when I start taking morphine?**

We always start with the lowest possible dose to allow your body to get used to it. Your pain should improve very quickly, although it may take a little while to find the right dose and so it may have to be increased if it is not enough to stop the pain.

## **What are the main side effects to look out for?**

Morphine tends to make you constipated and most people who take it need laxatives. Morphine can also make you feel sick when you first take it. Your doctor may give you something to stop this feeling, but it usually only lasts a few days. Morphine can make you feel sleepy for the first few days while you are getting used to it or when the dose is increased but our bodies can usually adapt gradually. However, if you are already taking painkillers they can often be equal in effect to a low dose of morphine, so changing to morphine should not feel especially different.

## **What about my day-to-day activities if I am taking morphine?**

You should find you can carry on doing the things you want to, when you are taking morphine. In fact many of our patients find they can do more because their pain is better controlled.

Driving may be possible but there are many factors to consider and your doctor or nurse will advise you.

It is illegal to drive if the opioids (e.g. morphine or oxycodone), you have been prescribed cause you drowsiness or slow your reactions. This can happen when you start to take opioids for the first time, increase the dose, or take a top up dose, but these effects often wear off after a few days. These side effects can be made worse by alcohol or other sedating drugs.

## **I thought morphine was an injection?**

Morphine is available as an injection too if needed although most patients take morphine in tablet form.

## **Will I have to take morphine forever?**

All your medication, including morphine, will be reviewed regularly with your doctor or nurse.

You may find that later on you have less pain than you have now or we may try a different treatment for your pain. If that happens, your doctor or nurse can gradually reduce or even stop the morphine. However if the cause of the pain is still there most people find they need to carry on taking it.