

*Affirming Life through compassionate palliative care & support*

# ST BERNARD'S HOSPICE

## MORPHINE INFORMATION



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# Morphine<sup>1</sup>

## *Your questions and fears answered & how to feel more comfortable with Morphine*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Your doctor has prescribed an oral morphine preparation to control & manage your pain. This insert is designed to answer most common questions asked by patients and their relatives regarding the use of an oral morphine.

Sometimes people are afraid to ask questions about pain or pain medicines. You will probably find the answers to some of your concerns within this insert booklet, but if you have any further questions, please ask your St Bernard's Hospice Professional Nurse or doctor.

It is important to understand that having cancer does not have to mean being in pain. With the palliative care medicines available today, most cancer pain can be relieved and managed.

Oral morphine is recognized around the world as one of the most effective medicines for relieving and managing cancer pain. Your St Bernard's Hospice Professional Nurse and doctor want to relieve and manage your pain and this is why they have recommended and prescribed an oral morphine preparation.

### **What is morphine and how does it work?**

Morphine is one of the oldest and most useful drugs in the world. It is a very powerful painkiller that has helped relieve the suffering of millions of people all over the world. Morphine is a natural product made from opium and opium is derived from specifically grown poppy plants. Extensive research and design has made morphine available in modern medicines that are simple to use to maximum effects.

Quite simply, morphine interrupts pain signals traveling to the brain – the sensation of pain is therefore removed before you can feel it.

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<sup>1</sup> With acknowledgement to Adcock Ingram

## Is it really necessary for me to take morphine?

Some people are scared to take morphine, causing themselves suffering, as well as distressing their families. Having cancer does not equal pain. Morphine is the most effective drug to relieve, control and manage the severe pain caused by cancer.

Morphine is recommended when other pain relievers with lesser strength stop being effective.

### How do I take morphine?

Take one in the morning and again in the evening. The tablets have different and varying strengths so that your doctor may titrate the dose up or down according to the degree of pain that you are in. Morphine is available in four forms:

- Liquid mixture
- Tablets
- Injections
- Durogesic patches

*Most people only require Oral Morphine, meaning you take it through the mouth. There are two forms of oral morphine:*

1. **Morphine mixture:** Often measured into measuring cup, the mixture controls pain for 4- 6 hours and is often used to determine the initial dose of morphine.
2. **Long Acting Morphine Tablets** – These slow release tablets known as MST CONTINUS Tablets (which are the ones that you have been prescribed) are taken twice a day

**Injections:** Morphine is injected into the skin via a tiny needle attached to a syringe. You can wear the syringe like a pistol in a holster and strap it around your shoulder. These morphine “pumps” or “drivers” automatically administer a specified dose of morphine throughout the day.

**Durogesic Patch:** Ask your St Bernard’s Hospice Professional Nurse regarding the patches (apply 48 – 72 hours) and how they work. This is one of the most expensive options.

## Points to remember when taking MST CONTINUS tablets

- Never grind or break the tablets in half, this will upset the release action of the drug in your body.
- The tablets are designed specifically to be taken regularly, twice a day to control pain properly.
- Should you experience pain during the two doses, morphine mixture is recommended to control this “breakthrough pain”. You should however adhere to your daily routing of taking tablets once in the morning and once at night.
- The mixture should only be required occasionally.
- Should you need regular amounts of mixture in addition to the tablets, the dosage of your tablets should be increased by your doctor and/or STBH Professional Nurse.

The same applies when using morphine (Duragesic) patches.

For various reasons, some people are not able to take morphine by mouth. In these situations morphine can be administered in the form of suppositories that are inserted into the rectum. Suppositories provide pain relief in about half an hour from insertion and lasts between 4 and 6 hours. MST CONTINUS tablets can also be inserted directly into the rectum providing 12 hour relief from pain.

## How much morphine must I take?

This depends on your pain. Morphine dosages differ from one patient to the next. Your doctor and/or STBH Professional Nurse will prescribe the correct dose of morphine to control your pain whilst keeping the side effects minimal.

## Can I continue to take morphine indefinitely?

You can continue to take morphine for as long as you need to. Remember your morphine dose can always be increased or decreased.

Many patients remain on the same dosage for very long periods, whilst others need to have their dosage adjusted downwards & upwards. It is important to remember to take morphine regularly and in the correct dosage in order to control the pain.

## **If I take morphine now will it still work later?**

Remember that pain does not always get worse – it may often decrease and even go away. If your pain gets worse, your doctor and/or STBH Prof Nurse will simply increase your morphine dosage. Morphine can gradually be increased as much and as often as required. Your doctor and/or STBH Prof Nurse will advise you whether your therapy should be changed.

## **Can I stop taking morphine when the pain goes away?**

There are two reasons as to why your pain may have stopped – the cause of pain has gone; OR; because you are taking appropriate painkillers (morphine).

Your doctor and/or STBH Prof Nurse will ascertain the reason and advise you accordingly. If it is the morphine that causes the pain to go away or stop, the pain will just come back if you stop taking morphine.

The best way to take morphine for pain management in an illness like cancer, is to continue taking the morphine to prevent the pain from coming back. Don't only use (take) the morphine once the pain appears.

## **Can I take other medication whilst taking morphine?**

You can take morphine together with all commonly prescribed medicines. You should however just check with your doctor and/or STBH Prof Nurse and advise them as to what you are taking. They will probably be able to reduce the amount of medicines you are taking.

## **Will I become a morphine addict?**

**NO, YOU WILL NOT.** Only when there is no genuine pain or morphine is abused is there concern of addiction occurring. **When used for pain relief, addiction does not occur.** Remember that your doctor and/or STBH Prof Nurse can always reduce your dosage or stop taking morphine completely if other forms of treatment such as radiotherapy are able to control your pain.

## **Will morphine alter my lifestyle?**

Pain will certainly hamper your lifestyle. Morphine controls your pain, thus improving your lifestyle. If your pain can be relieved and controlled you can enjoy day-to-day life just like you have always done.

## **What are the side effects of morphine?**

*There are three side effects that are usually controlled.*

- Drowsiness can occur for a few days after first taking morphine. It will soon however wear off.
- Some people feel nauseous when they first start taking morphine. Nausea can however be avoided by taking anti-nauseous medication for a few days.
- The side effect that can persist is constipation. Adjusting your diet and taking mild laxatives can however relieve this symptom. Speak to your STBH Prof Nurse for more information on using morphine and constipation.

## **Why would I feel sleepy after taking morphine?**

You may have been in a great deal of pain before taking morphine and not been able to sleep well as a result. With your pain being relieved and controlled by the initial intake of morphine, you may need to sleep a little more for a few days and allow your body to catch up! If however drowsiness continues for longer than just a few days, please consult with your STBH Professional Nurse. If you are taking the correct dosage of morphine, undue sedation should not occur.

## **Why would I feel nauseous after taking morphine?**

Some patients experience upset stomachs and feel nauseated for one to two days after first taking morphine or increasing their dosage. This symptom will settle after approximately two days. If it does not, please consult with your STBH Professional Nurse for further advice.

## **Why does morphine make you constipated?**

Constipation is a common side effect of many medicines called narcotic analgesics. Morphine basically slows down your bowel movements, causing constipation. It is important to relieve constipation whilst still maintaining your intake of morphine. Most patients taking morphine suffer from constipation but are able to prevent it from becoming too severe by using laxatives. Constipation can be treated.

## **Will I feel disorientated and confused when taking morphine?**

If used correctly, morphine will not turn you into a mindless robot. When taking morphine you can continue to work, read and conduct business just like you always did, providing of course that you are physically able to do so. If you suffer from any mental confusion it could mean that your dosage requires adjustment. Please consult with your STBH Professional Nurse should you experience this symptom and your therapy can be adjusted accordingly.

## MYTH – Morphine can cause you to die

This myth is not true it does not cause you to die. The fact that you have been prescribed morphine does not relate to how long you will live. Thousands of people take morphine for conditions other than pain relief from cancer, such as severe back pain. Patients have taken morphine, even very large doses for many years and have not suffered from any major complications as a result. **Morphine does not lengthen or shorten anyone's life expectancy. Morphine is used to control pain – it is used at many stages of many illness, not just at the end of life.**

## Can I drive while taking morphine as a medication?

As with many medications, it is not advisable to drive or operate machinery whilst taking morphine, simply because your reactions may have become slower and you may feel drowsy. You are not immediately disqualified from driving once you have taken morphine. Your STBH Professional Nurse and/or doctor will advise you whether you can drive.

## Will morphine affect my sex life?

It shouldn't – in fact now without the pain, your sex life may even improve. Should you have any problems in this area however, you should discuss it with your doctor.

*Don't be afraid of morphine, It could help relieve your pain.*

