

Opioids for pain after surgery:

Your questions answered – resource for patients

Surgical patients are four times more likely to receive opioids at discharge from hospital than their non-surgical counterparts. A recent study of post-surgical patients by *Brat et al (2018)*, showed each additional week of opioid prescription is associated with a significant increase in opioid misuse among opioid-naïve patients.

A patient resource, “Opioids for pain after surgery: Your questions answered” was developed collaboratively with, and endorsed by, Patients for Patient Safety Canada, the Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI), the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists (CSHP), the Canadian Deprescribing Network, Choos-

ing Wisely Canada, the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH), the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), the Canadian Association of General Surgeons, and the Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada (ISMP Canada). This resource was developed in accordance with recent guidelines and preferred practices. The handout, which builds on the movement ‘5 Questions to Ask about Your Medications’, was launched by Choosing Wisely Canada through the Opioid Wisely Campaign.

The aim is to equip patients with important messages in plain language about opioid use after surgery. Some

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For more information, please contact:

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Opioids for pain after surgery: Your questions answered



1. Changes?

You have been prescribed an opioid.

Opioids reduce pain but will not take away all your pain. Ask your prescriber about other methods of reducing pain including using ice, stretching, physiotherapy, or non-opioid drugs like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Know your pain control plan and work closely with your prescriber if your pain does not improve.



2. Continue?

Opioids are usually required for less than 1 week after surgery.

As you continue to recover from your surgery, your pain should get better day by day. As you get better, you will need less opioids. Consult your healthcare provider about how and when to reduce your dose.



3. Proper Use?

Use the lowest possible dose for the shortest possible time.

Overdose and addiction can occur with opioids. Avoid alcohol and sleeping pills (e.g. benzodiazepines like lorazepam) while taking opioids. Do not drive while taking opioids.



4. Monitor?

Side effects include: sedation, constipation, nausea and dizziness.

Contact your healthcare provider if you have severe dizziness or inability to stay awake.



5. Follow-Up?

Ask your prescriber when your pain should get better.

If your pain is not improving as expected, talk to your healthcare provider.

To find out more, visit: OpioidStewardship.ca and DeprescribingNetwork.ca

THIS RESOURCE WAS DEVELOPED IN ACCORDANCE WITH RECENT GUIDELINES AND PREFERRED PRACTICES

key messages include: use the lowest possible dose for the shortest possible time; opioids are usually required for less than one week after surgery; and ask about the use of other methods to reduce pain including non-opioid pain medications.

The resource also advises patients to securely store medications and to return any unused medications to a community pharmacy. Improper storage or disposal of opioids has resulted in accidental poisonings, medication errors, and inappropriate use. The Health Product

Stewardship Association (www.healthsteward.ca) can be contacted for more information about locations that accept unused medication returns.

Opioids for pain after surgery: Your Questions Answered is available:

In English: <https://www.ismp-canada.org/download/OpioidStewardship/OpioidsAfterSurgery-EN.pdf>

In French: <https://www.ismp-canada.org/download/OpioidStewardship/OpioidsAfterSurgery-FR.pdf>

For more information about use of opioids, visit www.opioidstewardship.ca

This article was submitted by Alice Watt and Sylvia Hyland, Pharmacists, Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada (ISMP Canada).