

Understanding painkillers after day case surgery



Information for patients

Anaesthesia Services



Why is it important for me to take my painkillers?

Some pain following surgery is to be expected. It is not unusual to feel general aches and pains. Pain around your surgical wound usually settles as the wound heals.

Good pain relief is important. It prevents suffering and helps you to recover more quickly. There are a variety of ways in which we can provide pain relief. Your anaesthetist will discuss different pain relief methods with you before your surgery.

Preventing complications

- You are less likely to develop a chest infection if you can breathe deeply, cough and move comfortably after your operation.
- You are less likely to get blood clots (deep vein thrombosis or DVT) if you can move around freely and often.

How do different painkillers work?

- Aspirin, ibuprofen and diclofenac come from a group of drugs called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). NSAIDs work by changing the body's response to pain and swelling.
- Codeine and tramadol are similar to, but weaker than painkillers such as morphine, and work by blocking pain messages in the brain and spinal cord.
- Paracetamol works in a different way to NSAIDs and codeine. It is particularly helpful in reducing fever and relieving pain.

How should I take my painkillers?

- Pain medications such as paracetamol and NSAIDs work better at preventing pain when taken regularly.
- Codeine and tramadol are useful in the quick relief of breakthrough pain.

As your pain settles and you are beginning to feel more comfortable, you may reduce the dose and frequency of your pain medications. You are the only person who can judge your pain relief requirements.

What are the complications?

All medicines can cause unwanted side effects. Used in the short-term these are not generally troublesome, but if painkillers are used long-term, then there can be an increased risk of more serious side effects. If you have any unwanted side effects or if you have any concerns, you should seek advice from your doctor, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

The risks with taking simple painkilling drugs are small:

- Paracetamol is exceptionally safe in normal doses.
- NSAIDs such as ibuprofen can sometimes cause stomach irritation. This can become more severe, with a 1 in 200 chance of causing ulcers or stomach bleeding, if taken for one month or longer. NSAIDs can also make asthma worse, but most people with asthma are not affected. They can also cause problems with your kidney function, especially if you become dehydrated or if you already have a kidney problem. Therefore you need to drink plenty of water after the operation. You must stop taking them if you get any stomach pains or if they make you more wheezy if you suffer from asthma.
- Codeine or similar drugs can make you feel sick or light-headed. They can make you itch and almost always cause some degree of constipation. We therefore suggest that you drink plenty of fluids and eat some high fibre foods if taking codeine.

Who should I contact if I am worried about my painkillers?

Once you are at home, if you have any queries or worries regarding your pain management you can contact:

Theatre Admissions Unit (TAU)

- **0114 226 9436 (Northern General)**
7.00am - 7.00pm
- **0114 226 5614 (Royal Hallamshire)**
7.00am - 10.00pm

Day Case Unit

- **0114 226 6020 (Northern General)**
7.00am - 8.00pm
- **0114 271 3874 (Royal Hallamshire)**
7.00am - 5.00pm

When you are discharged from the TAU or Day Case Unit, you will also be provided with another number, which you can ring outside these hours, or you can contact your GP.

What should I do if I run out of painkillers?

When you leave hospital you should have been given enough painkillers to last until you no longer feel pain from your surgery. This is usually for about a week. If you run out of painkillers and you are still getting pain, please contact your GP.

Alternative formats can be available on request.

Please email: sth.alternativeformats@nhs.net

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