**Taking Opioids for Pain (Patient Information Leaflet)**

**How do Opioids Work?**

Opioids are some of the strongest painkillers and provide pain relief by acting on areas in the spinal cord and brain to block the transmission of pain signals. Opioid drugs can help manage some but not all types of chronic pain.

**When should I take my Opioid Medicines?**

Your healthcare team will advise on how and when to take your opioids to give you pain relief most of the time, and so you don’t get too many side

effects.

**What dose of Opioid should I take?**

You should always take the correct dose of prescribed medicines. If you feel the dose isn’t

enough, or if the side effects interfere with your life, you should discuss this with your

healthcare team.

**How long will it take to work?**

This depends on the form that has been prescribed. Fast acting tablets may be used when you first start trying

opioid treatment. They may work within an hour and last for around three to four hours. Slow

release tablets or patches take longer, up to two or three days to begin to have any

noticeable effect.

**What are the possible side effects?**

When you first start taking opioids you can get some side effects, which usually stop after a

few days. These include: - feeling dizzy, feeling sick (nausea), being sick (vomiting), feeling sleepy

and feeling confused.

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Opioid medicines can cause some problems when you take them for long periods of time.

These problems include: - constipation\*, itching, weight gain, lack of sex drive and difficulty breathing at night\*\*

\* This is a common problem when taking opioids and does not tend to go away the longer you take opioid medicines. You may need to try laxatives to treat constipation. If you experience a lot of side effects your team may suggest changing to another opioid drug.

\*\* This is most common if you are overweight and if you snore heavily. If you have a condition called obstructive sleep apnoea it may not be safe for you to take opioids.

**Can I drive when I’m taking Opioids?**

The law in the UK allows you to drive if you are taking prescribed opioid medicines in

accordance with the instructions from your prescriber (including what your prescriber advises

you about driving safely). You should never drive if you feel unsafe

You are responsible for making sure you are safe on each occasion that you drive.

The law on drugs and driving in the UK changed in 2015. If your driving is impaired for any

reason, including taking medicines, it is illegal to drive. It is also now illegal to drive when you

are taking opioid medicines without them being prescribed, even if you are not impaired.

If you are taking a high dose of opioid your prescriber will advise you that you are probably not safe to drive and will document this in your medical notes.

It is unsafe to drive in the first few days after starting an opioid and for a few days after dose

change (up or down). Drinking alcohol reduces the amount of opioid medicine you can take and

drive safely so do not drive if you have drunk alcohol and taken opioid medicines.

**What if I want to stop taking an Opioid?**

Do not stop taking your opioid suddenly, you may experience withdrawal symptoms. Speak to

your healthcare professional (doctor, nurse, pharmacist) who will be able to supervise a gradual

reduction.