

PAIN KILLERS (Analgesics.)

Analgesics, commonly known as painkillers, are extensively used in the treatment of pain in chronic illness. Pain is the body's signal that you have a problem. Pain usually happens if there is injury or inflammation. Painkillers work by either blocking pain signals going to the brain or by interfering with the brain's interpretation of the signals.

Occasionally there is no medical reason why pain happens but this is fairly rare. As there is often no cure for chronic illness then you may have regular or constant pain if the symptoms of your chronic illness cannot be controlled well. Pain can be incredibly difficult to live with and can completely change your quality of life. It is important that you are prescribed the right medication for your pain. It is also important that your doctor or specialist, helps you stabilize the symptom that is causing the pain in the first place. There are pain specialists and pain clinics that are available in larger hospitals. You may have to be referred, if your pain is ongoing and not improving with medication.

Keeping a Pain Diary

There are many reasons why pain occurs in chronic illness and many forms of drugs to help alleviate the pain. If you have chronic or regular acute episodes of pain, it is helpful for you to keep a pain diary. In this way you can easily show your doctor the pattern, type and severity of pain you have. This makes it easier to prescribe or adjust your dosage of painkiller. This can be a useful tool for you to sense a pattern of pain and try to medicate yourself before it can get too severe. You may be able to predict when it is better to rest, either before or during your pain.

Side Effects of Painkillers

All painkillers can give you constipation. Some can severely constipate you. The worst offenders are the opioid based drugs, (narcotic analgesics), especially morphine. You will need to be prescribed a laxative when you are given these drugs. If possible eat as high a fibre diet as you can and drink plenty of water. Report to your doctor if constipation becomes a problem. There are numerous drugs to alleviate pain and therefore numerous possible side effects. Always ask about them and read any information sheet given to you.

Some common side effects are;-

- Gastric irritation/ Nausea.
- Light-headedness / Dizzy.
- Drowsy.
- Constipation.
- Dry mouth.
- Blood pressure lowers when you suddenly stand up.
- Pupil's contract.
- Urinary retention.

Some less common side effects are;-

- Confusion / Hallucinations.
- Rash/ Itch.
- Hypothermia.
- Change in heart rate.
- Severe headache.
- Muscle rigidity.
- Problems breathing.

Extreme caution should be taken if you are taking painkillers and:-

- Drinking alcohol.
- Driving.
- Using heavy machinery.
- Already have liver or kidney disease.
- Pregnant or breast feeding.
- Allergic to other pain killers.
- Have a dependency for narcotic drugs.

It is extremely important that you do not take more medication than you are prescribed. It could even be potentially fatal. If you are still in pain after taking your painkillers, you may need a different medication or your dosage increased slowly. Consult your doctor about this as soon as possible.

Tips on taking Painkillers

- Find out about your medication. Ask questions and read your information leaflets
- Take your medication as prescribed. If you are prescribed painkillers at set times of the day, take them at these times to avoid breakthrough pain.
- If you are to take your painkillers when you feel pain, then take them as soon as you feel pain. If you wait till the pain is well established, your painkillers will take longer to work.
- As mentioned previously some anti-inflammatory drugs have a degree of painkiller properties in them.
- Keep a pain diary and note your pain scores.
- Never give your painkillers to others, to relieve their pain. They may be allergic to them.
- If possible eat as high a fibre diet as you can and drink plenty of water.
- Ask your specialist about learning coping strategy that may help you to reduce the severity of your pain.
- Antidepressants can be used in small doses to treat chronic pain.