

Types of Opioid Pain Medications

What is happening

Different opioid medications may be used in hospice care depending on:

- The type and severity of pain
- Ability to swallow medications
- How long symptom relief is needed
- Side effects or response to treatment

The hospice team will choose the medication and form that best fits the patient's needs.

Why these medications are used

Opioid medications help:

- Reduce moderate to severe pain
- Improve comfort and rest
- Reduce shortness of breath in some situations
- Improve quality of life

Different opioid medications work in different ways and for different lengths of time.

Common opioid medications

Hydrocodone and Oxycodone

- Usually taken as tablets
- Commonly used for moderate to severe pain
- Often given every several hours as directed by the hospice team

Morphine

- Available in liquid and tablet forms
- Commonly used for moderate to severe pain and shortness of breath
- Liquid forms may work more quickly and can sometimes be given more frequently if needed

Fentanyl

- Often given as a skin patch
- Patches usually last about 72 hours
- Different strengths are available

Methadone

- Available in tablet and liquid forms
- Long-acting medication used for moderate to severe pain
- May help reduce the number of doses needed during the day

What you can do

- Give medications exactly as directed by the hospice team
- Tell the hospice team if:
 - Pain is not controlled
 - Medication seems to wear off too quickly
 - Side effects become concerning

Some long-acting medications should:

- Not be chewed
- Be handled only as instructed by the hospice team

Important constipation prevention

Constipation is very common with opioid medications.

Most patients taking opioids should also take a **laxative**, unless the hospice team advises otherwise.

When to call hospice

- Pain remains uncontrolled
- The patient is difficult to wake
- Breathing becomes unusually slow or weak
- Severe constipation or abdominal pain develops
- You are unsure how or when to give medication
- Medication patches fall off or appear not to be working properly