

# Pain Management After Surgery or Procedure

**Expect to have pain after surgery. Your care team cannot promise that you will be pain free.**

It is normal to have pain after surgery. Our goal is to keep you safe. We want your pain managed at a level that is tolerable to you without putting you in danger. There are many options for relieving pain after surgery.

## Pain Management Options

You can manage your pain by:

- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- Guided Imagery
- Progressive relaxation
- Essential Oils
- Changing your position
- Warm blanket
- Sleep or rest
- Adding pillows
- Dim lighting
- Music, movies or TV
- Cold or warm compresses
- Quiet room
- Elevation
- Walking

## Pain medicine

Your pain may also be managed with one or more of these:

- Opioids (strong prescription pain medicines)
- Muscle relaxants
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
- Anti-inflammatory medicines or NSAIDS (ibuprofen or naproxen)
- Nerve pain medicines
- Topical products (creams and lotions)

You may take acetaminophen and ibuprofen together. Take 500 mg of acetaminophen (Tylenol®) **and** 200 mg of ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®).

You can take this dose up to four times each day. Each dose must be at least 6 hours apart. This is an effective way to manage your pain.

This treatment is safe for most patients. Discuss with your surgery care team to learn if it is safe for you.

## Opioids

Opioids are more helpful when used briefly for acute pain after surgery. If opioids are prescribed, use them only as needed and never more than prescribed. Long-term use may lead to unwanted or unsafe side effects, dependence, and addiction. As you recover from surgery, your opioid use should decrease. Call your surgery care team if severe pain continues.

Opioids may be an important part of your treatment but have serious risks. It is important to work with your surgery care team to make sure that you are getting safe and effective pain relief. Your care team will discuss which medicines are best for you.

### Risks of Opioid misuse

- Misusing opioids may have serious consequences including death.
- Misusing your medicines may lead to addiction. Take your medicines only as prescribed.

### To stay safe while you take opioids

- **Take** your medicines only as directed by your provider.
- **Do not** share your medicine with anyone. It is illegal and dangerous.
- **Never** drive or operate machinery while you are taking an opioid.
- **Do not drink alcohol or use marijuana or illegal drugs when taking opioids.** You risk your life when you mix alcohol, marijuana, or illegal drugs and opioids.
- **Do not mix other medicines with opioids.** Talk to your provider about all the medicines you take, whether prescribed or over-the-counter. Tell your provider if you use:
  - Herbal products
  - Drinks or powders for weight loss or gain
  - Drinks or powders for increased energy or strength
  - Anti-anxiety drugs
  - Sleeping pills

### **Common side effects of opioids:**

- Constipation – A common problem eased by:
  - Exercise
  - Drinking more fluids
  - Eating more fruits and vegetables
- Nausea, vomiting and upset stomach
- Itching
- Sweating
- Decreased ability to fight infection
- Irritability
- Depression
- Decreased breathing rate leading to death
- Decreased testosterone level (male sex hormone)

If taken as prescribed, opioids can be safe. Even when taken as prescribed, opioid use can lead to:

- Tolerance – Opioid effects lessen as your body gets used to them.
- Dependence – After you become used to an opioid, your body reacts if you stop taking it too quickly. Flu-like symptoms and severe problems may occur.
- Addiction – This can result when you take opioids for the wrong reasons, knowing they can harm your mind and body.

These risks increase with long term use. Limit use of opioids to less than seven days.

### **About your opioid prescription**

The state of Wisconsin requires your surgical team to check the Enhanced Prescription Drug Monitoring Program or ePDMP website. This website documents all controlled substances you have filled. This is an attempt to limit drug misuse or abuse.

The prescription you receive will be for a **small** amount of opioids. Our goal is to:

- Provide enough medicine to control pain after surgery
- Limit the amount leftover that could lead to misuse of the medicine by you or others

- Use the most recent medical evidence to decide the number of tablets patients having similar surgeries need
- If you begin running low on your initial prescribed amount and believe you will need more, **call the clinic 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. weekdays.** Prescriptions for controlled substances, such as opioids, need to be sent electronically via a special system that is only available in the clinic or hospital. Weekend refills may not be available.
- Not all pharmacies carry some of the products that our patients with special needs require. For this reason, you may need to pick up the prescription at a specific pharmacy.

### **Opioid storage**

Pain medicine should not be stored with other household medicines. Keep it in a secure place. Lock it up if needed. Decide who must know what medicines you take because opioids may be abused by family or friends. Do not share prescription pain medicine with any other person. Opioids can be deadly to children, even in small doses.

### **Safe medicine disposal**

When you stop taking an opioid or other prescribed medicine, dispose of them as soon as you can. To protect yourself, others and the environment:

- Do not put medicines in a sink or drain
- Do not flush them down the toilet

Unused or out-of-date pills, capsules, powders, liquids and inhalers can be disposed of in drop boxes after being prepared. To prepare:

1. Remove the medicine from their container.
2. Place them in a leak-proof bag that can be sealed.
3. Place the bag of medicines in a drop box.
4. Peel or scratch personal information off labels
5. Rinse and toss boxes, bottles, and vials in your trash.

### **Drop boxes**

Gundersen Health System- La Crosse Campus

- Main Clinic Lobby (near the pharmacy)
- East Building Pharmacy

## Gundersen Health System- Onalaska Campus

- Clinic Pharmacy

There may be other disposal sites closer to your home. Police departments in La Crosse and other towns in this area have lobby drop boxes. Other drop box locations can be found by calling your local pharmacy or Great Rivers 2-1-1.

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This information is meant to inform and educate our patients. It supports the care you receive from your health care team. It does not replace medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment. Talk to your doctor or health care team before starting any new treatment.

Last revised 11/01/2018 PE 002517