

Supplementary medicines information for palliative care patients

All medicines are supplied with a manufacturer's 'Patient Information Leaflet'. This can provide a great deal of information about the medicine, its normal uses and side effects. However, most medicines have more than one effect on the body and for many years, palliative care (hospice) doctors have found that certain medicines are safe and effective for the treatment of symptoms **other** than those specified by the medicine's manufacturer and there is now plenty of experience to confirm such use.

We are providing you with this extra information to inform you of the reason(s) why you are taking this medicine and to highlight any other information. This should be read in conjunction with the **attached** manufacturer's patient information leaflet.

Morphine

Morphine is normally prescribed as a strong painkiller. In palliative care, morphine is sometimes prescribed to relieve breathlessness.

Frequently asked questions

Q. What form(s) of this medicine are there and how is it usually taken?

- Immediate release (quick acting) morphine tablets are called 'Sevredol' and the oral liquid is usually called 'Oramorph'. These medicines are usually taken every 4 hours, either regularly, or when needed
- Slow release morphine tablets are usually called 'MST' and the slow release capsules are usually called 'Zomorph'. Both are taken every 12 hours.

NB Always follow the dose indicated on the label or advised by a healthcare professional.

Q. What are the most likely side effects?

- Constipation is very common when taking morphine and most people will need to use a laxative.
- Sickness and vomiting are common especially in the first 48-72 hours but these usually improve with continued treatment. Your doctor may therefore prescribe anti-sickness medication when you start taking morphine.
- Itching skin is problematic for some people.
- Morphine may make you feel drowsy or confused initially, but this is likely to improve with continuing treatment. If it doesn't, consult your doctor.

Q. What are the main special instructions and precautions when taking this medicine?

- You should always let health care professionals know that you are taking morphine and you should not stop taking it suddenly.
- You should not drive unless you are on a stable dose and are sure that your reactions are not affected. Please discuss this with your doctor.

Q. Is it safe to take morphine and does it cause addiction?

- Morphine is a highly effective, strong pain killer. Many years of use in palliative care have shown that if used carefully and in the correct dose for each patient, it can be perfectly safe with the minimum of side effects.
- Many years of experience of use in palliative care have shown that when morphine is used appropriately, addiction is not an issue.

Further information

If you have any questions about any of the medicines you have been prescribed or have any problems with side effects, please speak to one of the following:

St Catherine's Hospice
Telephone: 01293 447333

St Catherine's Hospice Pharmacist
Telephone: 01293 535000