

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl belongs to the group of medications called opioids. Fentanyl and morphine are strong opioids. Codeine and tramadol are weaker opioids. It is used to help manage severe pain if other pain relief has not helped. It is usually taken with regular paracetamol.

How is fentanyl patch used?

Fentanyl is available in patches. The brand name is Matrifen®. The full instructions on how to use your patch are in the patient information sheet that comes with the patches, read this carefully.

- The usual starting dose is a 12 micrograms (mcg) patch
- The patch should be changed every third day
- Remove the old patch before applying a new one
- Apply patch to hairless area of the upper body
- Avoid extreme external heat and tell your doctor if you have a temperature or a fever
- Do not let other people use your patches
- Keep patches away from children and dispose of them safely

Warning

- Do not use more medication than advised
- Do not increase the dose of medicines without medical advice
- Doing so may cause severe drowsiness or breathing problems

Are there any side effects?

Medication can cause side effects but not everyone will get them. A full list is in the patient information sheet with your prescription.

Common side effects are feeling sick, constipation, confusion, drowsiness and occasionally vomiting.

If fentanyl makes you feel drowsy you should avoid driving or operating machinery. It is a criminal offence to drive a vehicle whilst unsafe due to medication use. This might be worse when you start the medication and each time your dose goes up. Alcohol may make the drowsiness worse and should be avoided where possible.

Less common side effects are itching, sweating, dry mouth, headache, rash or slow breathing. Let your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist know if you experience any of these side effects.

If the patch causes redness or itching, take it off and put it on another part of your body. If this continues, remove the patch and contact your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist.

Long term use of opioids

We are becoming more aware of the risks of taking opioids long term. They can affect your hormone system, immune system and bone mass. They may also cause 'hyperalgesia' where you may feel an increase in all-over pain.

Opioids have the potential to cause tolerance, dependence and addiction, although this is rare when taken as prescribed for chronic pain. This is more likely if there has been dependency on other drugs, alcohol or nicotine.

If you think you are having any of these side-effects or if you have any worries about them, please discuss these with your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist.

How long should I stay on fentanyl?

When fentanyl is used to treat chronic pain there can be pain relief initially. There may be little or no benefit in the long term. If you have been taking morphine for a long time a gradual reduction may be tried to see if you still need this medicine.

How do I reduce the dose of fentanyl?

Do not suddenly stop fentanyl. A dose reduction plan can be discussed and agreed with your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist. You may need different strengths of your medication to do this.

A reduction of 12-25mcg of your total daily dosage of fentanyl is often recommended. The dose should only be reduced every 1 or 2 weeks. This process can be repeated until the opioid is withdrawn.

Medication in chronic pain

The benefit from taking medication should always be more than any side-effects you may have. Only **you**

- know how bad your pain is
- are able to say if your medication is helping
- know what side effects you are having

It may take a few weeks or several trials of different medications to find the best combination for you and your pain. It may help to keep a diary of your pain and other symptoms. Side effects often become less once you have been on a medicine for a few days.

Please read the patient information sheet given with each medication. It will give you more information about the medication and any side effects.

You can discuss your pain medication with your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist. They can give you advice on which pain medications may help and they can help you find the best way to take your medications. They can advise you on putting your dose up safely if your pain is worse and on taking less medication safely when your pain is less.

If your medication is not helping you may not need to take it. Please talk to your doctor or pharmacist first. Some pain medications should not be stopped suddenly.

Do not share or take other peoples medication. Always advise your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist about any other medication or products you are taking for chronic pain including things bought from the pharmacy, herbal supplements or non- prescribed medications.

Understanding how your medications work may help you to get the best pain relief from it with the least side-effects.

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Fentanyl patch

Patient Information Leaflet



GETTING YOU ON TRACK TO RECOVERY

NHS Fife provides accessible communication in a variety of formats including for people who are speakers of community languages, who require Easy Read versions, who speak BSL, read Braille or use Audio formats.

NHS Fife SMS text service number 07805800005 is available for people who have a hearing or speech impairment.

To find out more about accessible formats contact:
fife-UHB.EqualityandHumanRights@nhs.net or phone 01592 729130