

Oral Morphine

Other names: Oramorph® liquid (immediate release or quick acting morphine)
Sevredol® tablets (immediate release or quick acting morphine)

Modified release morphine:

MST Continus® tablets or granules (12 hourly, long acting morphine)
Zomorph® capsules (12 hourly, long acting morphine)
Morphgesic® SR tablets (12 hourly, long acting morphine)
MXL® capsules (24 hourly, long acting morphine)

There are different forms of morphine and different brands – check the name of the medicine on the box.

Q. What is morphine used for?

A. Morphine is used for moderate to severe pain, and to help breathlessness. Quick acting morphine starts to work after about 30 minutes and usually lasts for about 4 hours. It is used to control breakthrough pain as it works quickly. It may be given in regular doses when your doctor is working out how much morphine is needed to control your pain.

Long acting morphine is used to control on-going pain and is taken regularly.

Q. Isn't morphine only used for patients who are at the end of life?

A. NO. Morphine is given for different sorts of severe pain. This may be as a result of cancer, heart disease or other illnesses. Treatment with morphine may be needed to allow you to continue having as comfortable a life as possible. You will be able to go on taking morphine for as long as you need to. The effects do not wear off with time and the dose can be increased if needed.

Q. When do I take it?

A. Quick acting morphine is sometimes taken regularly every 4 hours. An extra dose can be taken if the pain comes back between the regular doses or if you are taking long acting morphine to control your pain. Wait about 30-60 minutes after taking the extra dose of quick acting morphine. If you still have pain take a second dose. If you need more than 2-3 extra doses of quick acting morphine in a day, tell your doctor or nurse.

Long acting morphine is taken every 12 hours to control pain. When you are at home, take your morning dose when you wake up and then the evening dose about 12 hours later. There is one type of long acting morphine (MXL®) that is taken once every 24 hours.

Do not stop taking morphine suddenly.

Q. What do I do if I forget to take a dose?

A. Take a dose as soon as you remember. Do not take a double dose to make up for the missed one. If you are sick and bring up the medicine, repeat the dose as soon as you feel better.

Q. Are there any side effects from taking morphine?

A. Sleepiness

This is most common when you first take morphine or when the dose is increased. It should improve after a few days.

Constipation

This is a very common side effect. It is important to drink plenty of fluids and always take a laxative regularly as prescribed by your doctor. The dose of laxative can be increased or reduced to make sure you pass a soft motion regularly.

Sickness

If you feel sick when you first start to take morphine, try taking it with food. Your doctor may need to give you some anti-sickness medicine for a few days until the sickness goes away.

Q. Will I become addicted to morphine and unable to stop taking it?

A. NO. If you no longer need to take morphine, your doctor will reduce the dose gradually.

Q. Will morphine always relieve my pain completely?

A. Although morphine is a very good pain killer, it is not helpful for all types of pain. Other treatments may be needed and suggested by your doctor or nurse.

Q. What do I do if I get pain between the regular doses of morphine?

A. If the pain is mild, paracetamol may help. (Do not take more than 8 paracetamol tablets in 24 hours). If it is more severe you should take a dose of quick acting morphine (see above). If you need more than 2-3 extra doses in a day, tell your doctor or nurse.

Some people find that doing certain things like having a bath or going for a walk brings on the pain. Your doctor or nurse may suggest you try taking a dose of quick acting morphine before you start doing something that brings on the pain.

Q. How will I know if the morphine is not going to work for some of my pain?

A. You may still have pain despite taking bigger doses of morphine and may feel unwell in one or more of these ways:

- more sleepy than usual
- feeling sick more of the time
- restlessness or jumpiness
- bad dreams

Do not worry if this happens. Tell your doctor or nurse. Your doctor may reduce your dose of morphine and suggest other treatments to help the pain.

Q. Can I drive?

A. You may be able to drive but you must discuss this with your doctor.
(Patient information leaflet: Strong pain killers and Driving).

Q. Can I drink alcohol?

A. A small glass of wine, beer, sherry or whisky may help you feel better and improve your appetite. It is best to avoid taking more than this as you may become too drowsy.

(Discuss this leaflet with your doctor or nurse who will answer any questions you may have)