

Possible Side Effects of Opioids

The following side effects may happen when opioids are given. Your nurse and doctor will assist your child should any of these occur:

- ♥ **Nausea** (upset stomach) and **vomiting** (throwing up)
- ♥ **Itchiness**
- ♥ **Difficulty with urination**
- ♥ **Slow breathing or sleepiness**
- ♥ **Constipation.**

What if the Medication does not seem to be working?

- ♥ Tell your doctor or nurse if you feel that your child/youth is uncomfortable. Sometimes the pain management plan needs to be changed.
- ♥ The doctor may decide to change the medication dose, the timing or type of drug, or add a second medication.
- ♥ Use of non-medication methods to treat pain can be useful to assist with pain relief. (See "Helping the Manage Children's Pain Using Non-Medication Methods").
- ♥ When treatment of pain is difficult, more specialized health care professionals may be able to help, such as anesthesiologists,

Adapted with permission from *Let's Talk.. About helping manage your child's pain.* Iowa Health Centre. Primary Medical Centre, 07/1999 and *Pain, Pain, Go Away: Helping Children with Pain*, by J.P. McGrath & J. Ritchie, Association for the Care of Children's Health,

To Better Treat your Child/Youth's Pain...

- ♥ The health care staff will ask you or your child/youth about past experiences with pain. This helps them to understand your child/youth's pain and to know how he or she will act if there is pain. We will then be able to use the best type of pain relief.
- ♥ A nurse will check your child/youth's pain level regularly. Measuring pain level helps doctors and nurses to make sure that your child/youth is as comfortable as possible (see pamphlet entitled, "Recognizing Pain in Hospitalized Children").
- ♥ Together, you and health team members will most likely use 2 or 3 of the following methods to keep your child/youth as comfortable as possible: non-medication methods, over-the-counter medicines, and opioid medicines.



For more information on pain in children, see our companion pamphlets, *Recognizing Pain in Hospitalized Children & Youth*, and *Helping to Manage Children/Youth's Pain Using Non-Medication Methods*.

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Using Medication to Manage Acute Pain in Hospital



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“Over-the-Counter” Non-Opioid Medications



- ♥ Using regular doses of acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for short-term treatment is a very effective way to treat pain.
- ♥ Other anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), given around the clock, are also useful for certain kinds of pain or after some kinds of surgery.
- ♥ Pain medications take time to work, so it is best to treat pain early, so that the pain does not become too severe.

Opioid (Morphine-like) Medicines

- ♥ If acetaminophen or ibuprofen is not strong enough to control the pain, the doctor may prescribe an opioid medication, like codeine or morphine.
- ♥ Opioids and acetaminophen work differently to control pain. Together they are more effective than either one alone.
- ♥ Parents sometimes worry that their child/youth who takes an opioid will become addicted or learn to rely on drugs. Research shows that correct use of opioid medicine to treat pain will not cause a drug addiction.
- ♥ Opioid medicines are safe for children and youth under the direction of your doctor and nurse.
- ♥ If you have any questions regarding the use of opioids or opioid addiction, please ask your nurse or doctor.



Opioids can be given in several ways

- ♥ **Oral Opioids**, such as codeine, can be given as a liquid or a small pill.
- ♥ **Intravenous (IV) opioids** are given through a small tube into the vein. For safety, a heart rate and oxygen monitor may be used. There are 3 different kinds of IV infusions:

- 1) **Occasional doses** as needed.
- 2) **Continuous IV infusion**: a special pump is used to give small amounts of opioid medicine all the time.
- 3) **Patient controlled analgesia (PCA)**: uses a special pump to give medication through the IV. When a child/youth starts to feel pain, he or she pushes a button and receives a small dose of medication. The pump is set so the child/youth cannot give him or herself too much. PCA is used for children 5 years and older.

Continuous Epidural Infusion means that a small tube is put in the back, near the nerves that feel pain. A special pump sends medicine near these nerves. Local anesthesia (freezing) and opioid medicine are given together to stop the pain signals.

