

## Opioid Use

*When you need to take opioid pain medicines*

*This handout gives important information about taking opioid pain medicines while you are in the hospital.*

### What is an opioid?

An *opioid* is a drug that reduces the pain messages that reach your brain. Opioids are used to treat strong pain that may not respond to other medicines. Morphine, hydromorphone (Dilaudid), and oxycodone are types of opioids. You must have a doctor's prescription to use opioids.

### Why do I need opioids?

If your doctor prescribed an opioid, it means that other pain medicines are not strong enough to control your pain. Controlling your pain will help you be comfortable so that your body can heal.

We cannot make all your pain go away. It is also not safe to get rid of all pain. Pain is how your body tells you what it needs. But with good pain control, you can do these things to help your body heal:

- Rest and sleep
- Cough and breathe deeply
- Get out of bed and move

### How can I help manage my pain?

- If you have *patient-controlled analgesia* (PCA), it is important that **only you**, the patient, press the button. Family members and friends should **never** press the button. It is not safe.
- **Tell staff if you feel too sleepy or are having any breathing problems.** Opioids can slow your breathing enough to be life-threatening.



*Talk with your doctor or nurse if you have any questions about your pain medicine.*

- **Talk with your nurse** about your opioid doses. Ask about the best times for you to take it.
- **Use non-medicine methods** for pain relief, too, like music, cold packs, and meditation.

## Are there any side effects from opioids?

Opioids can make you:

- Sleepy
- Sick to your stomach (*nauseated*)
- Itchy
- Constipated
- Unable to think clearly

While you are on opioids, we will check on you often. We will do our best to manage any side effects. For your safety, we may wake you up from time to time after you have a dose of opioid medicine.

## How long will I be on opioids?

After 1 or 2 days, most new pain should start to lessen. When that happens, you will need less opioid.

Before you leave the hospital:

- We will help you develop a plan for how to reduce (*taper*) and then stop your opioids once you are home.
- Talk with your nurses and doctors about any concerns or fears you may have about taking opioids.

When you get home:

- Carefully follow your opioid plan so that you do not take too much.
- If you become too sleepy or have breathing problems:
  - Call 911 **right away**.
  - Do **not** take your next dose of opioid.
- If you have been taking opioids every day for several weeks or more, do **not** stop taking them all at once. Use the tapering instructions you received before you left the hospital.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about managing your pain.

**Now, please go back to the Table of Contents of this workbook and check the box so your nurses will know you have read this chapter.**