

## Opioid Safety in the Hospital

*For patients taking 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 medicine that eases pain by reducing the pain messages that reach your brain. Opioids are used to treat moderate to severe pain that may not respond well to other pain medicines.

Opioids are available only by prescription from a doctor. Some examples of opioids are morphine, hydromorphone (Dilaudid), and oxycodone.

### Why do I need opioids?

Managing your pain is important. We want to keep your pain at a level that keeps you comfortable and helps you recover. But, it is not possible or safe to get rid of all pain.

Our goals for pain relief include that you will be able to:

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

### What do I need to do to help manage my pain?

- Ask your nurse when you can have your next opioid dose and when is the best time for you to take it.
- If you have a *patient-controlled analgesia* (PCA) pump to give yourself opioids, it is important that **only you**, the patient, press the button. Family members and friends should **never** press the button for you because it is not safe.



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

- **Tell staff if you feel too sleepy or are having any breathing problems.** Opioids can slow your breathing enough to be life-threatening.
- **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 feel:

- 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:

- Follow your plan carefully so that you do not give yourself too much opioid.
- 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.