When You Leave the Hospital
Pain control and safety for patients

This handout explains pain control and safety for patients who are taking prescription pain medicine.

Pain Control

We want to help you control your pain so that you can do the activities that will help you recover after being in the hospital. But, you will have some pain and discomfort while you heal. Realistic goals for pain control are to prevent severe pain and keep pain at a lower level. Most people have mild to moderate pain with activity while they are recovering.

Your pain control plan includes taking medicines and using non-drug methods. Pain medicines do not remove all pain, so please also use non-drug methods such as heat, cold, or relaxation to help control your pain.

We will give you a limited amount of pain medicine to help manage your pain before your next clinic visit. You can expect your need for strong pain medicine to decrease quickly.

Non-prescription Pain Medicines

Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, before you take any prescription pain medicine, try taking both acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Advil) to control your pain.

You can buy acetaminophen and ibuprofen without a prescription. Follow the dose instructions on the bottles.

Opioid Medicines

Only take opioid pain medicines if you have strong pain that does not lessen when you take acetaminophen and ibuprofen or use non-drug methods. Oxycodone and hydromorphone (Dilaudid) are 2 types of opioid medicines.

Always take opioid medicines exactly as prescribed.
The label on the opioid bottle gives the **maximum** (highest) dose you can take. **Never take more than the maximum dose.** Taking too much opioid can cause you to stop breathing or can even cause death. If your pain is under control, take **less** than the maximum dose.

If you do take the opioid pain medicine, try to take less and less of it each day. This is called **tapering** or **weaning**.

To taper your opioid medicine, you can:

- Take a smaller dose each time; or
- Increase the time between doses

Your goal is to control your pain with acetaminophen and ibuprofen and to no longer need to take opioids. Call your prescriber’s clinic if you have any questions about tapering.

### Opioid Refills

Refills can take 2 to 3 business days. If you need a refill on your opioids:

- Call the clinic before you are all out of opioids. The clinic will call your doctor to talk about your pain plan.
- If your doctor says it is OK to refill your opioid prescription, you will need to come to the clinic to pick up your prescription.
- You must then take the prescription to your pharmacy. Opioid prescriptions cannot be called in or faxed to your pharmacy.

### Opioid Safety

- **Do not** drink alcohol while taking opioids. Using both at the same time can cause severe health problems or even death.
- Never take more than your prescribed dose of opioid medicines.
- **Do not let anyone else use your opioid medicine.**
- Store your opioid medicine in a safe place, where children and pets cannot reach them.
- Discard of any unused opioids safely. (See sidebar at left.)

### When to Call

Opioids can slow your breathing and heart rates. If they slow too much, it can cause death.

**If you become too sleepy or have breathing problems:**

- Call **911 right away**.
- Do **not** take your next dose of opioid.