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. Some of the stronger medicines we prescribe may be opioids. Oxycodone and hydromorphone (Dilaudid) are 2 types of opioids.

Even strong pain medicines do not remove all pain. 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. If you are taking opioids, you can expect your need for them to decrease quickly.

Pain Medicines

Acetaminophen and Ibuprofen

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

You do not need a prescription to buy acetaminophen and ibuprofen. You can buy them from our discharge pharmacies or your local drugstore. Follow the dose instructions on the bottles.

Opioids

Only take opioids if you have strong pain that does not lessen when you take acetaminophen and ibuprofen or use non-drug methods to control your pain.

Always take opioid medicines exactly as prescribed.
Discarding Opioids

Please discard unused or expired opioids in one of these ways:

- Drop them off at one of the UW Medicine Take-Back Kiosks listed below.
- Use another Medication Take-Back site. Find these online at www.takebackyourmeds.org.
- If you cannot use a take-back program, flush the opioids down the toilet.

 UW Medicine Take-Back Kiosks

 At Harborview Medical Center
- Ground-Center Tower
  Weekdays: 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.
  Weekends and holidays: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.
- Ninth & Jefferson Building
  Weekdays: 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.
  Saturdays: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

 At UW Medical Center
- Ambulatory pharmacy lobby
  Weekdays: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.
  Weekends: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- UWMC-Roosevelt pharmacy lobby
  Weekdays: 8 a.m. to 5:15 p.m.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your nurse if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call your clinic:

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After hours and on weekends and holidays, call the Community Care Line nurse: 206.744.2500.

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 make you 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 do this, 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

To get more opioids, you must have a new prescription from the doctor who first prescribed them. If you need a refill:

- Call your clinic before you run out of pills. The clinic will call your doctor to talk about your pain plan. It can take 2 to 3 business days to get your new prescription.

- If your doctor says it is OK for you to get more opioids, you must come to the clinic to pick up your new prescription.

- You must then take the new 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 secure place, where family, visitors, children, and pets cannot reach them.

- Help prevent opioid misuse and abuse. Discard 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.