

The use of Fentanyl patches for Palliative Care patients



Happier | Healthier | Hopeful

Information for patients who are prescribed Fentanyl patches

There are many myths about painkillers, especially strong ones known as opioids, such as Fentanyl. These can often cause fears and worries and may lead to pain not being controlled. It can help to know some of the facts about these strong painkilling medicines. Our leaflet does not replace conversations with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist but reading it may help you decide what questions you want to ask.

What is a Fentanyl patch?

Fentanyl is a strong opioid medication used to control pain that has not been controlled by weaker pain medicines. The drug is contained within a sticky patch, and when applied to your body gradually passes through your skin into your bloodstream. Once in your bloodstream, Fentanyl acts within your body to relieve pain.

Why have I been prescribed Fentanyl patch?

Fentanyl is most useful in patients with “stable” pain that does not require many changes in medication doses. It is also prescribed for patients who have difficulty swallowing tablets, cannot tolerate morphine or for those whose kidneys are not working well.

How is Fentanyl taken?

There are different brands of Fentanyl patch available, e.g. Matrifen, Durogesic. Where possible you will be given the same brand each time. If you notice that your patches are different from those you are used to using, ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice. Fentanyl patches come in a variety of strengths 12,25,50,75 and 100mcg/hour. Check the name and the dose on your medicine packet.

There is no fixed or maximum dose of Fentanyl. You may need to wear more than one patch to make up the correct dose for you. Each patch remains in place for 3 days.

What should I do if I still get pain whilst I have a Fentanyl patch on?

Fentanyl patches provide a background of pain relief. As well as the patch you will also be given a quick acting pain killer in case you have pain despite the patch. Reasons why you might get pain include;

When you first use Fentanyl patches for the first time, or if your dose is increased, it can take a day or more for you to feel maximum benefit

You may experience pain while doing a particular activity despite the patch e.g. washing or walking. If you know an activity is likely to cause you pain, you can take a dose of your quick acting pain relief before you do the activity.



Sometimes you may experience pain without an obvious cause (breakthrough pain). Remember it will also take over 12 hours for the effects of a patch to wear off after it is removed

Immediate release opioids

Most patients will also be prescribed a short acting strong pain medicine to take with their Fentanyl patch in case they get ‘breakthrough’ (extra/sudden) pain e.g Oramorph or Oxynorm or immediate release Fentanyl tablets or nasal spray. These act quickly but the effects also wear off over hours. A variety of strengths may be prescribed.

How do I use a Fentanyl patch?

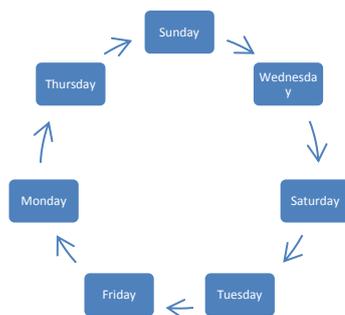
Change your patch every 72 hours at roughly the same time of day e.g. if a patch is applied to the skin on Monday at 10am it should be replaced with a new patch on Thursday at 10am. Changing patches regularly like this will give you a steady level of medicine in your body.

If you are using more than one patch then all the patches should be changed at the same time. Take your old patch(es) off and fold each patch in half so that it sticks together.

Choose a place on the upper arm or upper body to stick the new patch. The skin should not have cuts, spots or other blemishes and not be too hairy. The area should be dry and clean.

Change the area where you stick the patch so that one area is not used twice in a row. Peel the backing off the new patch(es) and stick firmly onto the chosen area of skin.

The following diagram may be helpful to remind you when you next need to change your patch. Mark the day on the diagram when you first put your patches on. Follow the arrow to the next day shown. This is the day when you should change your patch(es). Keep following the chart in a clockwise direction.



You might like to use this table to write the current brand and strength of patch

Date	Strength of Patch	Brand of Patch

What side effects should I look out for?

Constipation- These medicines can cause constipation in most people. Eating more fruit, vegetables, brown bread, bran based cereals and drinking more fluid may help but most people will still need a regular laxative

Feeling sick or vomiting- This can happen when you first take these medicines but it usually only lasts for a few days. Your doctor can give you something to stop this symptom

Drowsiness– if you become unusually sleepy after starting on Fentanyl patches, or after the dose has been changed, contact your GP/Palliative care nurse/district Nurse

Skin rashes/irritation– some people have an allergic reaction to the adhesive on the patch

Not Sticking –If the patch does not stick securely you may be given a dressing to keep it in place by your GP/District Nurse.

A high body temperature may increase the absorption of the drug from the patch. If there is an increase in any of the above side effects contact your GP/Palliative care nurse/district nurse. Similarly, you should not apply a heat pad to the body near to the patch.

Storage and disposal

Your Fentanyl patch needs to be kept in a safe place out of reach of children and pets. Patches should be disposed of carefully by folding them in half to stick firmly together and if possible replacing them in their packet. The packet can then be placed in the household rubbish. Please return any unused patches to the pharmacy

Frequently asked questions

What do I do if I forget to change my patch or a patch has fallen off?

Put a new patch on as soon as you can. If there has been a long delay you may need to take extra doses of your quick release pain medication, whilst waiting for the level of Fentanyl in your body to increase

What can I do if my patch falls off frequently?

Inform your doctor or nurse as you can be given tape to stick over the patch. Clipping hairy skin may also help but do not use shaving gel/foam or soap.

Can I go for a swim or take a shower?

Yes. Patches are waterproof, however, having a hot bath wearing a patch is not recommended.

What about driving?

Check the leaflet that comes with your medicines for information on how your medicines may affect your ability to drive. Do not drive after taking your medicines until you know

how they affect you. Do not drive if you feel drowsy, dizzy, unable to concentrate or make decisions, or if you have blurred or double vision

If you are taking your medicine in accordance with the advice of a healthcare professional and/or as printed in the accompanying leaflet and your driving is not impaired, then you are not breaking the law.

It may help to discuss this with your doctor, specialist nurse or pharmacist but

Remember – ultimately the risk lies with you. It is an offence to drive whilst your ability is impaired, if in doubt, you should not drive. It is suggested that you carry a copy of your prescription or a used medicine packet when driving.

For more information go to www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law

Will I become addicted to Fentanyl?

No. Taking Fentanyl for pain will not make you become an addict. If another treatment can relieve the pain we can often reduce or stop fentanyl but this should be done in a controlled way. You should not stop using the patch without discussion with your doctor or nurse.

Taking Fentanyl abroad on holiday.

Please consult your GP as you may require a letter. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Contact us [if not included elsewhere]

This factsheet has been produced by the service.

Your team is based at

.....

Telephone:

.....

Confidentiality

‘The Trust’s vision is to keep your information safe in our hands.’

We promise to use your information fairly and legally, and in-line with local and national policies. You have a right to understand how your information is used and you can request a copy of the information we hold about you at any time.

For further information contact the Information Governance Team on 01228 608998 or email Information.Governance@cumbria.nhs.uk

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback, which helps us to improve our services. If you have any comments, compliments or complaints to make about your care, please contact the Patient Experience Team.

Email: PET@cumbria.nhs.uk Tel: 01228 602128 Freephone: 0800 633 5547

If you would like this factsheet in another language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio, please call:

01228 603890

E:communications.helpdesk@cumbria.nhs.uk

Or write to Engagement and Communications
Voreda House | Portland Place | Penrith | CA11 7QQ



Happier | Healthier | Hopeful