

Information leaflet on

Pain Control after Surgery



By your side

Introduction

Most people find having an operation stressful and are often worried about the amount of pain they will have afterwards.

Although we can't say exactly how you will feel, many women have told us that the kind of pain is more like a dull ache and discomfort than a sharp pain. We have also found that even after the same operation, no two women have the same amount of pain or need the same amount of painkillers. In other words pain is a very individual thing.

This leaflet tells you about the sort of pain you might feel and the different types of painkillers you will be offered.

What sort of pain will I get?

As you would expect, the first 24-48 hours after your operation is usually the most uncomfortable time. The discomfort is mainly in your tummy and some people describe it as a bad period type pain. It is not unusual to find that one side of your tummy hurts more than the other.

After the first day the pain should be more of a dull ache. By the 2nd or 3rd day you should be feeling much better although still quite tender. Gradually after this your pain will continue to improve.

How will my pain be treated?

Again, that depends on how much surgery you've had done, but there are 3 types of pain killers we can give you as described below.

You will probably find you need to take them for anything up to a fortnight after your operation.

It is important that you are able to mobilize and take gentle exercise after your surgery, therefore make sure your pain is not restricting this. It is also important to take adequate rest so don't overdo it.

Relaxation and Rest

Coming into hospital is often a stressful experience. Pain, the fear of pain and anxiety are all unpleasant feelings and can make the experience of coming into hospital that much worse.

Some women find they can deal with stress by controlling their breathing. If you find yourself taking short, shallow breaths try to make your breathing a bit slower and deeper.

Other women find it helpful to consciously relax some of the muscles that tense up very quickly when we are anxious; the muscles around the back of the neck, across the shoulders and down into the small of the back.

We are all here to try to make your time in hospital as comfortable as possible so if you have any other questions or worries about your pain relief, then please speak to the anaesthetist who will see you before you go theatre or the ward nurse.

Paracetamol

This is suitable for mild pain or discomfort and is best taken on a regular basis for the first couple of weeks. Typically 1g (TWO tablets) Four times a day but not exceeding EIGHT tablets in total in a 24 hour period. Paracetamol may be combined with stronger painkillers if necessary.

Non-steroidal Anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

Such as Ibuprofen or diclofenac. You will probably be given some of this during your operation. This is suitable for mild to moderate pain. Not everyone can take this type of drug, particularly if you have asthma or stomach problems. You may be given codeine instead.

Morphine

This is a strong painkiller and depending on the amount of surgery you have had done, you might need it for the first 24-48 hours.

Some people worry about being addicted to morphine. This is very unlikely to happen; as the pain and discomfort get better you just don't need it anymore. The morphine can be given in different ways depending on the amount of surgery you have had.

By Mouth

The most convenient way of taking morphine is in liquid form that you can take by mouth. It takes about 10-20 minutes to work unfortunately it doesn't taste very nice but it can be taken with a small amount of fruit juice

By injection in to a muscle

We don't give injections of morphine very often because we know that many people don't like them. They are however still a good way of providing a quick and effective dose of morphine and occasionally they may be necessary.

PCA (patient controlled analgesia)

This is the best way if you have had a lot of surgery and is given by a pump. You will have a button to press whenever you need the painkiller. The pump is set up so that you cannot overdose yourself. There is a separate leaflet which explains PCA in more detail.

Morphine can often make you feel a bit sleepy so it's quite normal to have extra oxygen if you are on PCA. Morphine can also make you feel a bit sick but this can readily be treated. Sometimes morphine can also make you feel a bit itchy or 'spaced out'. Please tell the nursing staff if you are worried about anything.

The Recovery Room

After your operation, you'll wake up in the recovery room. If you're in pain, please do tell us, because it's important that you feel comfortable before you go back to the ward. If you are on PCA, the nurse will give you the button to hold and you can press it whenever you have pain. If you are not on PCA the staff may give you a morphine injection or morphine liquid.

The Ward

When you get back to the ward you should be feeling fairly comfortable and you'll probably feel quite sleepy as well. Many women find the night after their operation is rather disturbed because the nurses, who'll be looking after you, will be making regular checks on you. It is important that you let the staff know if you have any pain even when you move. We want you to be as comfortable as possible. If you have had the surgery early on in the day, you may be able to sit out of bed for a very short period on your operation day.

The following day you will either have a wash by your bedside or be helped to the bathroom for a wash. It may sound cruel to get you up so soon, but we know that it helps to stop a number of complications. Later on in the day you will also be able to go to the day room for your meals. It is therefore important that your pain is well controlled so please let staff know if you feel you are not having enough pain relief.

After a couple of days, some women find that the biggest problem is wind pain and this can be quite sharp. Peppermint capsules sometimes help and we do keep a supply of these on the ward. There are other remedies available which may also help and can be brought in or purchased from the on site pharmacy. (They are not allowed to be provided free on the NHS). Inform nursing staff before taking any of these.

What sort of pain killers will I need when I go home?

By the time you are ready to go home, which should be within 1-3 days, your tummy should be feeling much better. Every now and again it might be still a bit tender, particularly when you are tired. If you require more than paracetamol you will be given a supply of painkillers to take home with you if you do not have some already at home. Paracetamol may be purchased from the on site pharmacy.

We have updated our Privacy Notices in line with the data protection legislation (General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)/Data Protection Act 2018. For more information about how we use your personal data please visit our website at:

<https://bwc.nhs.uk/privacy-policy>

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