Pain management

This fact sheet is for people who have presented to the emergency department and need pain management.

This fact sheet provides general information. If you have specific concerns, speak to your healthcare professional for further information and advice.

What is pain management?

There are many different conditions or injuries which cause pain, ranging from mild to severe.

Everybody reacts differently to pain and feels it differently. The aim of pain relief (analgesia) is not to remove pain, but to make it manageable for you.

You have been prescribed pain killers (analgesics) for a condition causing you pain. This factsheet is to provide information on how to take the pain killers.

The length of time you need to take your pain medications will depend on:

- the condition or injury sustained
- your current health and medications you may already be taking.

Treatment

The aim of the pain medication is to help you get up and around and move as much as possible.

If the medications are making you sleepy and you need to lie down because of them (go to bed all day), then that is not the right outcome.

Balanced pain management

Your doctor may recommend that you control your pain by taking two or three pain killers.

By using two or more pain killers, that act in different ways, you will achieve:

1. A superior effect (i.e less pain).
2. You will reduce the adverse events (side effects) - that can occur from your medications.

The initial pain killers to take are paracetamol and ibuprofen (Nurofen), both available from your chemist. Please do not take ibuprofen if you have been advised not to by your doctor, or if you have kidney problems, severe asthma or a stomach ulcer.

The best way to manage pain is to keep on top of or ahead of it. This means taking regular pain medications at the beginning and then reducing them as you need them less.

If you have not gotten ahead of your pain or your pain has become very strong, you will initially need more pain medication to get on top of your pain. Once your pain is controlled, you can reduce the medications.

Continue your paracetamol and ibuprofen until your pain is gone, at which point you can reduce these or stop them.

This can happen over a few days or up to a week.

You will have had your first dose of paracetamol and ibuprofen in the emergency department and should continue to take these for at least 48 hours.

These pain killers should be taken after some food.

If you have ongoing pain, then you will be prescribed a stronger medication such as oxycodone (Endone), either 5 or 10mg, which can be taken 4-6 hourly.

What to expect

- For most painful conditions the worst of the pain settles in a few days.
- As explained by your doctor, when the need for the stronger medication reduces, you should reduce the number and frequency of the pain killers you are taking, e.g. oxycodone.
- If you require strong pain medications after five days then see your local doctor.
- Occasionally, individuals may become addicted to strong pain medications such as oxycodone - because it can make some people feel good. This is why we recommend you see your local doctor after five days to review your medication plan, either continuing with the oxycodone or an alternative pain killer if needed.

In summary

- Take paracetamol and ibuprofen regularly - starting your first doses when you are in hospital.
- Take a strong pain killer as prescribed by your doctor, until you don’t require it.
- See your local doctor if pain increases.
- If pain persists after five days see your local doctor.

- If you get sick or have stomach pain - cease your medications and see your local doctor.

Example of what your pain prescription table might look like

Adult initial medications

	Paracetamol	**Ibuprofen (nurofen)**
Strength	500mg	200mg
Number of days	……	……
Dose	2 tablets (1g)	2 tablets (400mg)
Frequency	4 times a day	3 times a day
Suggested times of day	0800, 1200, 1600, 2000	0800, 1400, 2200 after food

Adult strong medications

	Oxycodone (endone)	**Other**
Strength	5mg	……
No. of days	……	……
Dose	1-2 tablets	……
Frequency	Every 6 hours	……
Suggested times of day	Max dose ……. per day	Max dose ……. per day