Department of Palliative Care and Pain Medicine

Information for patients being discharged from hospital on fentanyl patches for moderate to severe pain

Fentanyl patches - transdermal continual release
Other names – Durogesic DTrans® patches

Who is the leaflet for? What is its aim?
This leaflet is for patients (their relatives or carers), who have been discharged from hospital on fentanyl patches for moderate to severe pain.
Fentanyl is an opioid painkiller from the same group of medicines as morphine.
Fentanyl patches are used commonly for ongoing severe pain from many different causes. The painkiller is contained within the patch and is absorbed through the skin slowly and continuously while the patch is in place. Its use will have been explained to you before you leave hospital. Do not hesitate to ask for more information or to have it repeated for you if needed.
Fentanyl is safe and effective when used properly and will be helpful in controlling your pain.
Pain control may be an ongoing process and professionals will work with you to adjust the medication doses as needed. Health professionals (including doctors, nurses, pharmacists and opticians) will need to know that you are taking these medications so do inform them even if you are consulting them for an unrelated matter.

Benefits
The medication you have been prescribed will help to control your pain enabling you to be more comfortable and active at home.

How to use Fentanyl patches - how long does a fentanyl patch last?
Each patch will last for three days (72 hours). The first patch will take 12-24 hours to take full effect.
Change your patch (or patches) every third day, at about the same time of day. Use a calendar to mark the day when you first start your patches and when you change them. You should not stop using fentanyl suddenly.

**How do I change my patch(es)?**

1. Take the old patch off, fold it in half so that it sticks together and put it back in its original pouch. The used patch can then be put in the bin with your household rubbish. Discard safely out of reach of children.

2. Wash your hands. Choose a place on the upper body or upper arm. The skin should not have any cuts, scars or spots and should not be too hairy. Hairy skin may be trimmed with scissors but must not be shaved. Clean the skin with water only. Make sure it is cool and completely dry. The patch should not be placed on skin that will be under a bra, bag strap or anything else that will place compress the patch.

3. Tear open the pouch of the new patch. Peel off the plastic backing. Stick the patch on to the clean area of skin. Press it on firmly and hold until completely stuck. Wash your hands. Do not stick the patch on the same place twice in a row.

4. Keep all patches (used and unused) out of the reach and sight of children. This medicinal product does not require any other special storage conditions.

5. Do not use fentanyl patches after the expiry date which is stated on the carton and pouch. The expiry date refers to the last day of that month. If the patches are out of date, take them to your pharmacy.

If you are using fentanyl patches regularly and you forget to change it or it falls off stick a new one on as soon as you can. You may need to take a top-up dose of your quick-acting painkiller until the Fentanyl patch starts working again.

If you get pain while using a fentanyl patch there are a number of reasons for this. The first is that the patch takes time to start working – in this case take a dose of your normal short-acting painkiller. Fentanyl is a very good painkiller but it does not work for all pains – if you are finding you are need to take between two to three extra doses per day of a short-acting strong painkiller speak to your doctor or nurse.

**Side effects**

Fentanyl patches may cause you to feel sick when you first start using them them; although this is less likely than with other strong painkillers. For most patients symptoms of nausea fade as the body gets used to the new drug.

Fentanyl causes less constipation than other painkillers for moderate to severe pain but you may still need to take a laxative. Maintaining a good fluid intake, being active and having fibre in your diet will also help.

Some mild drowsiness while your body is getting used to the new medication is infrequent. Some people report vivid dreams or feeling “jittery”.

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If you are affected, it will usually resolve over a few days but you should avoid driving and operating heavy machinery. If the drowsiness or “jitteriness” stops you from reading a newspaper, following the plot of a television programme or is not improving please seek medical advice promptly.

If you develop itching or redness under the patch, tell your doctor or nurse.

Very occasionally, patients who change from a different pain-killer to Fentanyl feel unwell in the first 24-48 hours with sickness, shivering, stomach pains or diarrhoea. Contact your doctor if this happens.

These medications are safe for you. However, they are dangerous if they are taken by those they are not prescribed for. Please keep them out of the reach of children or anyone else who might take them inadvertently and if they are consumed seek urgent medical advice. They should be stored in the original container to protect from light and at a temperature not above 25°C.

The patches are waterproof so you can have a shower or bath or go swimming (avoid soaking the patch in a hot bath). Avoid too much direct heat like a hot water bottle, electric blanket, heat lamp or hot spa bath as this affects the way the medicine is released from the patch. If you develop a fever try to keep your temperature down and contact your doctor. Sweating or applying the patch to hairy skin may prevent it sticking well. You may be given some sticky tape to keep the patch on. Discuss with your doctor or nurse.

**Common questions asked about fentanyl and other opioid painkillers**

**Isn’t fentanyl something that’s used at the end of life?**

No. Fentanyl is given for different sorts of ongoing pain. If you have cancer, treatment with fentanyl may be needed to allow you to live as pain free as possible. You can go on taking fentanyl for as long as you need to. The effects do not wear off with time and the dose can be increased or decreased as needed.

**Will I become addicted to fentanyl and be unable to stop taking it?**

If you no longer need your fentanyl, the dose can be reduced gradually by your doctor without problems.

**What do I do if certain things like movement bring on pain?**

Some people find that doing certain things like having a bath or going for a walk bring on pain. Your doctor or nurse may suggest you try taking a dose of quick acting morphine (or your other quick-acting painkiller) 30 minutes before you start doing something that brings on the pain.

**Will fentanyl always relieve my pain completely?**

Although fentanyl is a very good pain killer, it is not helpful for all types of pain. Other treatments may be needed and suggested by your doctor or nurse.
How will I know if fentanyl is not going to work for some of my pain?

You may still have pain despite taking bigger doses of morphine and may feel unwell in one or more of these ways:

- More sleepy than usual
- Feeling sick more of the time
- Restlessness or jumpiness
- Bad dreams

Can I drive?

Once you get used to taking fentanyl and do not feel sleepy or unwell you may be able to drive. You must not drive if you feel that your driving may be impaired. Recent advice from the Department of Transport advises patients to carry evidence that you have been prescribed Fentanyl by a doctor in case you are stopped by the Police.

Can I drink alcohol?

A small glass of wine, beer or sherry may help you feel better and improve your appetite. It is best to avoid taking more than this as you may become too drowsy.

What do I do with the medicine if I stop taking fentanyl?

Patches which are no longer needed, which are past their expiry date or no longer needed should be returned to a chemist.

Alternatives

The clinical team looking after you will continue to aim to manage your pain as well as possible using a combination of drug and non-drug treatments. If you feel your pain is not as well controlled as possible (it may not be possible for you to be pain-free) there are many alternative options. Please contact a doctor or nurse. While you are awaiting advice do not alter the amount of your medication that you are taking or stop taking it suddenly.

Contacts/Further information

Once you are discharged your GP or Community Specialist Nurse will be providing support to help you manage your pain and to help you use the Fentanyl as effectively as possible.

References/ Sources of evidence


“Guidance for healthcare professionals on drug driving” Department of Transport; July 2014
We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

**Other formats:**

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.info@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

**Document history**

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