



What to expect in the first few weeks of decreasing opioid medicines

This leaflet may be of interest to you if you have agreed, or you are considering reducing or stopping regular opioid medicines for persistent pain.

In the first few weeks

Most people do not experience worse pain long-term, and many notice improvements because they are having fewer side effects.

Some people notice a short-term increase in the usual pain and some tiredness, restlessness, aches & pains. Only a few people report symptoms similar to flu-like illness and report feeling “down” or not quite themselves (so-called withdrawal symptoms). A slow reduction in dose (over several weeks or months) allows your body time to adapt to the smaller dose.

Your clinical pharmacist will have considered this when agreeing the plan to reduce your opioids with you.

Lisa took a high dose of opioids before deciding to stop. Her story highlights how she used positive thoughts to help her stick to her plan:

Once I was off the opioids, there were more good days than bad days and I started to feel more like me. It took me 6-months to come off them and then another good 6-months again before I really started feeling back to normal. Everyday I felt a little better so I was encouraged to stay off them... because I didn't feel so awful in myself, and so ill, the pain became more manageable.

To find out more about Lisa and her experience of living with pain and taking regular opioid medicines, click [here](#) or using the camera on your phone, scan the code below:





Steps you can take to cope with the changes to the medicines you take

“Dogs are up there, makes you be more active when you can and some support when you can't. Computer games work as good distractions to support medication under-performing”

A discussion forum participant on steps that can help when first making changes to opioid medicines

It can be useful to remember why you decided to make the change to your medicines, especially if you are experiencing some withdrawal symptoms.

The reasons vary from person to person, but there are common themes why people want to make changes (for example, the medicines you take cause you some unpleasant side-effects). Pain medicines such as opioids are only one tool in a long list of options to help people to live well with persistent pain. Other ways, such as regular exercise or spending time with friends and family often make the first few weeks a little easier.

What to do if you are experiencing problems

You will have days when you can cope with the changes to the medicines you take better than others. On bad days (when you can cope less well) you may have the feeling that you want to resume a higher dose of opioids again, and this is not unusual.

There may be some steps you could take when faced with a setback, or a bad day. You will have agreed a setback plan with your pharmacist to help on bad days. It may be useful to revisit your setback plan and to remember why you decided to make the changes in the first place.

If you are struggling to keep to your agreed plan and want to speak to your clinical pharmacist, please phone your GP practice as directed in your pain review plan.