

Palliative Care Department

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Information on driving whilst taking strong painkillers

This leaflet gives information and advice to people who are taking strong painkillers and also wish to drive. Contact phone numbers and useful websites for more information can be found inside the leaflet.

How will strong painkillers affect me?

Strong painkillers can affect each person in a different way. They may make you drowsy (sleepy) which can cause you to react slower than usual. These effects can be made worse if you are also taking other medicines that can cause drowsiness. Drinking alcohol whilst taking strong painkillers can also make you more drowsy.

What are strong painkillers?

There are a number of strong painkillers available. Strong painkillers commonly prescribed by doctors include: Oramorph, MST, Oxynorm, Fentanyl, Oxycontin and Sevredol.

Advice on driving whilst taking strong painkillers

You should not drive for at least five days when you first start taking strong painkillers, or if you are changing the dose of strong painkillers. Sometimes longer is needed.

There will be other times when you must not drive, these include:

- if you feel drowsy
- if you have drunk alcohol
- if you have taken extra doses of strong painkillers for pain
- if you start taking other drugs prescribed by your doctor or bought from a chemist that may cause drowsiness, for example some hay fever medicines
- after taking strong drugs which have not been prescribed by your doctor, for example cannabis
- anything that makes you less able to make a sudden emergency stop with your vehicle

When can I start driving?

If you are not drowsy after you have been taking your strong painkillers for five days you can start driving again. Your first trip should be:

- Short
- On roads that you are used to
- At a time when the traffic is not too busy

You may also find it helps to have an experienced driver with you to begin with in case you cannot finish your journey.

Do I need to inform the Drivers Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) if I am taking strong painkillers?

No, you do not need to inform the DVLA that you are taking strong painkillers. However, there may be other information about your illness that the DVLA should know. Your doctor or the DVLA can give you more advice about this.

Contact details for the DVLA are: *Drivers and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), Longview Road, Morriston Swansea, SA99 8QD*. Phone: 0870 600 0301. Online: www.dvla.gov.uk. You will need to know your driving licence number when you contact them.

What about my car insurance company?

You should tell your motor insurance company about your current state of health, and what medication you are taking. Each insurance company is different, but your insurance may not be valid if you do not do this.

What are the legal implications of driving whilst taking strong painkillers?

The Crime and Courts Act 2013 includes an offence of driving, attempting to drive or being in charge of a vehicle, with a specified “controlled drug” (which includes strong pain killer medication) in the body above a specified level. The principle target for this offence is dangerous drivers who are impaired **after recreational use of drugs, i.e. used illegally or abused**. You are taking a strong painkiller for medical reasons, but should still be aware that the medicine can affect your ability to drive.

Legally therefore,

- *Do not drive while taking this medicine until you know how it affects you. It is not against the law to drive whilst being on a strong pain killer as long as:*
 1. The medicine has been prescribed to treat a medical problem (it is therefore worthwhile carrying a copy of your prescription and/or the original box/packaging with you, so that traffic police can verify your prescription).
 2. You have taken it according to the instructions given by the prescriber or the information provided with the medicine
 3. It was not affecting your ability to drive safely

Useful contact numbers

Specialist palliative care service for Taff Ely and Rhondda Valleys:

Y Bwythyn
Pontypridd Cottage Hospital
Pontypridd CF374AL

Y Bwythyn Day Centre
Tel: 01443 443758
Y Bwythyn Ward
Tel: 01443 443788

Specialist palliative care service for Merthyr, Cynon and North Rhymney valleys:

Palliative care unit
Ysbyty Cwm Cynon
Mountain Ash CF454BZ

Palliative care unit
Tel: 01443 715006

This leaflet was written by health professionals. The information contained in this leaflet is evidence based. It has been approved by doctors, nurses and patients. It is reviewed and updated annually.

Version: 3.0
Leaflet No: 3002
Date approved: 27/01/14
Revised: September 2014 (version 3.0)
Review date: October 2015