
PAIN AND PAIN RELIEF

What is pain? – Pain is the unpleasant sensation caused by illness or injury. It is how your brain interprets the signals from your body. It is easier to prevent pain than treat it when it occurs.

How much pain will I feel after my surgery? — If you're having surgery, you probably wonder how you're going to feel afterwards. The amount of pain you will have, and how long it will last, depends partly on what kind of operation you are having. For example, you might not have much pain at all after having a small growth removed from your skin. But you might have quite a bit of pain after a more major surgery, liver or pancreas surgery. How you feel after surgery also depends on your age, health, and other medical problems.

How is pain prevented? — Doctors use different medicines to make sure you do not feel any pain during your surgery. This is called an anaesthetic and can be general (fully asleep), regional where a large area of the body is made numb (an example is an epidural used for birthing) or local anaesthetic where small areas of the body are made numb (like used by dentists perform surgery). For some operations, a combination of methods is used.

During surgery, doctors can do different things to help control the pain you might have later. Patients undergoing surgery are expected to have some pain, so medications are given to prevent this before you come round. These are some of the things doctors can do:

- An injection (shot) of numbing medicine near where the surgeon is operating – This can help reduce pain around your incision (the cut in your skin).

- A "nerve block" – For a nerve block, a doctor gives medicine as an injection (shot) near certain nerves. This stops the pain signals the nerves normally send, so you don't feel as much pain in that area. The nerve block can last for several hours after surgery is over. Sometimes, the medicine is given through a small tube (called a "catheter") that stays in place during surgery and for a while afterwards.

- Pain medicines given through an "IV" – An IV is a thin tube that goes into a vein. There are different kinds of pain medicines that are given through an IV.

- Pain medicine given with spinal anaesthesia – For some operations, you might need spinal anaesthesia. For this kind of anaesthesia, a doctor puts a small needle in your lower back. Then he or she injects medicine to numb the nerves in your spine. The doctor can also give pain medicine this way.

- Medicines given through an "epidural" – This is a small tube (catheter) that goes into your back, near the nerves in your spine. The tube stays in during the surgery. It can also be left in after surgery, to help with pain while you are in the hospital. Doctors can use it to give both numbing medicines and pain medicines.

How is pain treated after surgery? — following your operation you will receive regular pain killers (whether you have pain or not) to prevent severe pain. If you are

able to swallow and absorb tablets this is the best option. Tablets can be slow release to produce pain relief over several hours, whereas injections do not last so long. Injectable pain relief is usually delivered via a drip in your arm or leg.

Types of painkillers

Paracetamol (Panadol) – this is a fantastic drug that most people use at home. Paracetamol is actually quite a strong painkiller, if used in the correct way. At home, most people will experience pain or a headache, before they take Panadol, which means you already have the unpleasant feeling of pain. In hospital, Panadol if given before the onset of pain and works very well to stop pain starting or to greatly reduce the amount of other painkillers required. If taken at suggested doses, Panadol is very safe. It also reduces a fever.

Non-steroidal (brufen, neurofen, advil, diclofenac, Mobic, etc.) – these medications treat pain, reduce fever and treat inflammation. They can be taken in combination with Panadol in the form of a tablet. They are usually used

for short periods of time as can cause some impairment of wound healing and ulcers. They cannot be used by people with kidney problems or asthma.

Opioids (morphine, endone, oxycontin, panadeine, targin, etc) – Opiod medications are some of the strongest pain killing drugs we have and work very well. They have a number of side effects including drowsiness, constipation and dependence. Ideally they should only be used for short periods of time during your recovery.

How long will I have pain? — It depends. After a minor operation, you might feel fine a few hours afterwards. After major surgery, you might need pain medicine for days or even weeks. Your doctor or nurse will work with you to make sure your pain is treated properly.

What will happen after I go home from the hospital? — Your doctor will tell you what kind of pain to expect after your surgery. A prescription for pain medicines to take after you go home will be prescribed and can be renewed with your GP.