

# Managing Pain

## Introduction

The Covid pandemic has had an impact on how long patients are waiting for their operations and many of these operations are designed to reduce or relieve pain. If you are on a waiting list, aged over 16 and you are in pain, this information is for you.

## How to manage pain while you are waiting for surgery

There are 3 groups of things that you can do to manage your pain:

1. Manage the problem that's causing the pain
2. Manage the pain itself by using medicines (either tablets or a gel)
3. Manage the impact of the pain on your life

### **1. Manage the problem that is causing the pain**

**If you have arthritis**, [Versus Arthritis](#) have produced useful information with regard to [living with arthritis](#) including changes you can make, and aids that you can use around the home that may help you better manage day to day tasks.

**If you have hip pain**, you might find our [hip pain management](#) resource helpful

**If you have knee pain**, you might find our [knee pain](#) resource helpful

**If you have carpal tunnel syndrome**, you might find our [carpal tunnel syndrome](#) resource helpful

### **2. Manage the pain itself by using medicines (sometimes called 'painkillers')**

Read this information carefully, even if you are already taking pain medicines or have tried them and stopped them because they didn't work for you.

*Remember*

- Most medicines for pain don't work as well as we would like, so don't expect them to take the pain away completely.
- Use medicines at the lowest dose that takes the edge off the pain to help you to become more active. Keeping moving is the most helpful thing you can do to manage pain effectively- see below for more tips about keeping active
- Most medicines for pain take about an hour to work, so think about taking them well before doing an activity you know will be painful
- People find it best to use medicines for pain in this way, because it's not unusual for pain to occasionally get worse for a few hours or a few days. We call this a 'flare' and it's worth having some medicines in reserve to help manage flares.
- Never take more than the recommended dose and if you are considering anti-inflammatories, make sure you know whether they are suitable for you
- Don't stop taking any medicines for pain without discussing with a pharmacist or your healthcare team

There are 4 main groups of medicines to consider. Some of them you can buy over the counter, some need a prescription:

1. Paracetamol
2. Anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen- either as tablets or as a gel.
3. Amitriptyline
4. Stronger medicines ('opioids')

**Paracetamol** (for more information see: <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/paracetamol-for-adults/>)

**Dose:** 2 tablets of 500mg up to 4 times a day. If taken regularly, do not take more than 8 tablets a day and if you weigh less than 50 kilograms (8 stones), do not take more than 6 tablets a day

**Available:** over the counter or on prescription

**Anti-inflammatories** such as ibuprofen, naproxen or diclofenac (Anti-inflammatories are not suitable for many people- for more information see: <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/ibuprofen-for-adults/>)

**Dose:** ibuprofen 400mg up to 3 times a day. If needed regularly, consider slow release tablets to be taken once or twice daily. The gel can be rubbed into the painful area 3 or 4 times a day. Gel causes less side effects than tablets, so for pain in small joints or in your knee, consider using gel before thinking of tablets.

**Available:** over the counter or on prescription. Slow release tablets are only available on prescription

*Paracetamol and anti-inflammatories work in different ways. If you don't get adequate pain relief with one of these medicines, consider using a combination of paracetamol and anti-inflammatories (being careful not to exceed the maximum dose of either).*

**Amitriptyline** is a medicine that has been used to treat depression for many years, but we now know that it's also a useful treatment for pain- though it doesn't help everyone. It has to be prescribed, so you'll need to speak to a healthcare professional if you want to consider taking it.

## Strong pain medicines

There is a group of strong pain medicines called *opioids*.

Codeine is the most commonly used opioid and is often combined with paracetamol or with ibuprofen. Morphine is a stronger opioid and is generally not recommended for people with arthritis pain. However if you do have arthritis and you are already taking morphine, do not stop taking it without speaking with your healthcare team.

**Availability:** medicines containing paracetamol or ibuprofen in combination with a small dose of codeine are available to buy over the counter or on prescription. Combinations of paracetamol or ibuprofen with higher doses of codeine are only available on prescription

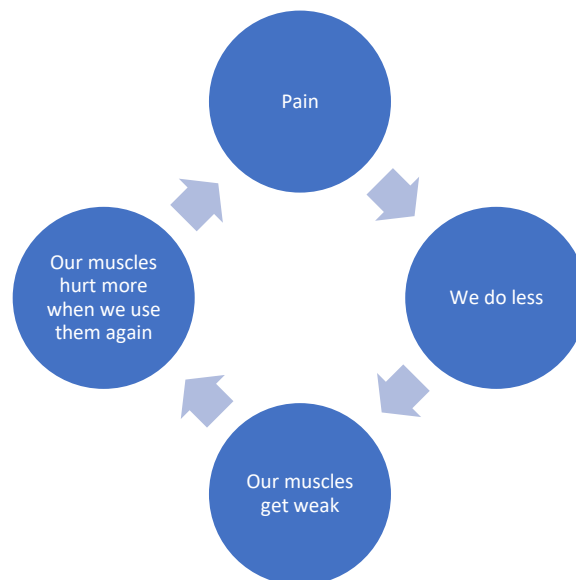
If paracetamol and anti-inflammatories are not helping your pain, you might want to discuss taking an opioid medicine such as codeine with a pharmacist or other healthcare professional. However, you should know that opioid medicines are by no means helpful for everyone, and there are 2 problems to be aware of:



1. **Dependence.** People sometimes find themselves needing higher doses of opioids over time to have the same effect.
2. **Difficulty with managing pain after surgery.** If you are taking opioids and you have an operation, it can be more difficult to manage your pain immediately after surgery

### 3. *Manage the impact of the pain*

Living with pain can have a big impact on our lives- it gets in the way of us doing the things we want to do, so we do less and our muscles get unfit. Unfit muscles complain and hurt when we try to do more again, so we can get into a vicious circle like this:



And it doesn't stop there, because as we do less, we can begin to feel worried, stressed, low in mood or even depressed and all this can also make the whole experience of being in pain feel worse- another vicious circle



People who live with pain tell us that there are a number of things they do to manage these vicious circles. There are some really good ideas about managing pain in the Pain Toolkit (<https://www.paintoolkit.org/pain-tools>), and also some good ideas here: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/pain/ways-to-manage-chronic-pain/>, and here: <https://my.livewellwithpain.co.uk>

The main things you can do:

1. **Recognise** if you are affected by one or both of the pain vicious circles
2. If you are, **know you are not alone**; everyone who lives with pain gets into these vicious circles, so **try not to be hard on yourself**.
3. **Try to be as active as possible**. Activity that we enjoy, that raises our heart rate and gets our body moving releases our body's own feel good chemicals and has a positive effect on our mood and fitness. Becoming more active isn't easy, but using a graded approach can help improve our confidence and fitness despite our pain
4. **Get a good night's sleep** Being in pain can make getting a good night sleep difficult causing daytime sleepiness and fatigue, irritable moods, poor memory and concentration, less motivation and less ability to cope with daily difficulties. Sleep Guides can provide useful information to improve our quality of sleep.
5. **Pace your activities**. People with pain tell us that it's tempting to overdo things but this often leads to more pain and then a period of enforced rest ('boom and bust').

Find an amount of activity you can do regularly and try to stick with it- avoid boom and bust

- 6. Think about ways of managing your mental health.** It's normal for pain to make us feel frustrated, stressed or depressed, especially if the pain is getting in the way of us doing what we want to do. If you can find ways of managing these feelings, your whole experience of pain will feel more manageable.

Here is a good resource to help with mental health: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>

### Useful websites

**Arthritis Action**                      [www.arthritisaction.org.uk](http://www.arthritisaction.org.uk)

**Versus Arthritis**                      [www.versusarthritis.org](http://www.versusarthritis.org)

**Pain Toolkit**                              [www.pain toolkit.org](http://www.pain toolkit.org)

**Live well with pain**                      <https://my.livewellwithpain.co.uk>

**The Sleep Council**                      [Home - The Sleep Council](#)

**Health Talk**                              [Healthtalk](#) - You are not alone. At healthtalk.org you can find information and support by hearing and seeing people's real life experiences of living with, and managing pain