

GUIDELINES FOR OPIATE THERAPY

Side effects for Opiate/Narcotic Medications may include...

- Drowsiness, sedation, disorientation, resulting in falls and resultant significant injury
- Constipation and bowel obstruction, possibly requiring surgical intervention and potentially resulting in ischemic (dead) bowel, sepsis and death
- Allergic and/or anaphylactic reactions to the medications resulting in hypotension (low blood pressure), tachycardia (fast heart rate), arrhythmia (irregular heart rhythm), respiratory or cardiac arrest and death
- Respiratory depression resulting in respiratory arrest and/or death, as well as resultant cardiac arrest and/or death
- Tolerance to the medication may develop after long-term use, which means that ultimately this medication may become less effective
- Physical dependency, psychological dependency and addiction are possible with all narcotic medications. These situations may result in discontinuation of the pain medication by your doctor.
- Withdrawal phenomenon may occur with abrupt discontinuation of the pain medication. This may cause significant side effects such as heart palpitations, diaphoresis (sweating), anxiety, nausea, vomiting, elevated pulse and blood pressure. Do not abruptly discontinue this medication. Your health care provider will guide you on how to stop narcotics using a slow weaning process.

Precautions while taking Opiate Medications:

- Patients taking anticoagulants (blood thinners) are at particularly high risk of any kind of trauma (falls, etc.) as a resultant life-threatening hemorrhage, intracranial bleeding, or death may occur.
- The elderly may exhibit marketed or dramatic side effects from narcotic medications, even in low doses.
- Patients with other significant medical problems (including heart or lung disease) are at high risk for complications related to the use of narcotic medications.
- Patients taking sedative medications or central nervous system depressants should use narcotics sparingly and in reduced doses due to additive and/or synergistic interactions and greater than expected or enhanced side effects.
- Narcotic analgesics should not be used during pregnancy.

Take precautions with the following activities while taking Opiate Medications:

- Any kind of activity where judgment is required (i.e. driving, signing important documents, caring for the sick, the elderly, or the very young).
- Narcotic medications may affect the ability to drive or operate machinery.
- Avoid working on high-risk area (i.e. construction sites, elevated work sites, working with power tools, etc.).
- Drinking alcohol is prohibited while on narcotics due to potent and unpredictable enhancement of central nervous system depression if these two substances were taken together.
- If you experience the side effects such as sedation with opiate use, do not participate in the above activities.

If you have questions regarding these items, please ask your physician or nurse practitioner during your visit.