

Pain Medication Side Effects

Learning about the side effects of opioid pain medications is essential for helping you be confident and comfortable taking or giving these medications. The good news is that not everyone has side effects from pain medications. In fact, most side effects can be prevented and some mild side effects such as nausea, itching or drowsiness, often go away after a few days as the body adjusts to the medicine.

The most common side effects of pain medications are drowsiness, constipation, nausea and vomiting.

Drowsiness

Pain medications may cause drowsiness when someone first starts taking them, but this usually goes away after a few days. If pain has kept the person from sleeping, he or she may sleep more for a few days after starting the new medication while catching up on sleep. Drowsiness also lessens as the body gets used to the medicine. The patient should take extra care and safety precautions when first taking pain medication and not do anything that requires them to be alert until the effects of the medicine are known. If the medication is not relieving the pain, the pain itself may be tiring the person out.

Constipation

Pain medications cause constipation in most people. They slow the movement of stool through the intestinal tract, which allows more time for water to be absorbed by the body and the stool to become hard. The body does not adjust to constipation from opioids, but it can often be prevented or controlled. It's best to start a laxative, stool softener or other treatments to keep the bowels moving at the same time as starting pain medication. The Tidewell Hospice nurse can provide information on stool softeners and laxatives, including how much and how to take.

Nausea and Vomiting

Nausea and vomiting caused by pain medications usually go away after a few days. If someone has more nausea when up or walking around but not when lying down, it may be better for them to stay in bed for an hour or so after taking pain medicine. This type of nausea is like motion sickness. If the pain itself is causing the nausea, using medication to relieve the pain usually makes the nausea go away. Medicines that relieve nausea can be prescribed if needed. Constipation may also worsen nausea. Nausea and vomiting alone usually are not signs of an allergic reaction to pain medications.

When to Call Tidewell

- If side effects from pain medicine need to be managed
- If the patient is too sleepy for normal activities after taking the medication for a few days
- If taking other medications that could also cause drowsiness
- If the medication is not relieving pain
- If stool softeners or laxatives don't relieve constipation
- If there are no bowel movement for more than two days or more
- If the patient is unable to hold down food or liquids for a full day
- If nausea lasts more than a few days

Call Tidewell with any questions (855) 843-3935: _____