Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Fentanyl

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US

Actiq [DSC]; Fentora [DSC]; Lazanda [DSC]; Subsys [DSC]

Brand Names: Canada

Duragesic 50 [DSC]; FentaNYL Citrate SDZ; Fentora; MYLAN-FentaNYL Matrix [DSC]; PMS-FentaNYL MTX [DSC]; SANDOZ FentaNYL; TEVA FentaNYL; TEVA-FentaNYL

Warning

All products:

- This is an opioid drug. Opioid drugs can put you at risk for drug use disorder. Misuse or abuse of this drug can lead to overdose and death. You will be watched closely while taking this drug.
- Severe breathing problems may happen with this drug. The risk is highest when you first start taking this drug or any time your dose is raised. These breathing problems can be deadly. Call your doctor right away if you have slow, shallow, or trouble breathing.
- Even one dose of this drug may be deadly if it is taken by someone else or by accident, especially in children. If this drug is taken by someone else or by accident, get medical help right away.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.

- Severe side effects have happened when opioid drugs were used with benzodiazepines, alcohol, marijuana, other forms of cannabis, or street drugs. This includes severe drowsiness, breathing problems, and death. Benzodiazepines include drugs like alprazolam, diazepam, and lorazepam. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- Many drugs interact with this drug and can raise the chance of side effects like deadly breathing problems. Talk with your doctor and pharmacist to make sure it is safe to use this drug with all of your drugs.
- Get medical help right away if you feel very sleepy, very dizzy, or if you pass out. Caregivers or others need to get medical help right away if the patient does not respond, does not answer or react like normal, or will not wake up.
- If you are pregnant or plan to get pregnant, talk with your doctor right away about the benefits and risks of using this drug during pregnancy. Using this drug for a long time during pregnancy may lead to withdrawal in the newborn baby. Withdrawal in the newborn can be life-threatening if not treated.

Skin patch (Duragesic):

- Avoid hot baths, sunbathing, and use of heat sources (including tanning beds, heating pads, and hot tubs). Avoid activities like heavy exercise. Tell your doctor if you get a fever. A rise in body temperature may cause too much drug to pass into your body. This can cause overdose and deadly breathing problems.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to manage pain.

All products other than injection:

- This drug is not for mild pain or pain that only lasts a short time (like headaches, toothaches, or pain after surgery).
- This drug is only for use by people who have been taking pain drugs (opioids) and are used to their effects. Talk with the doctor.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

All products:

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have any of these health problems: Lung or breathing problems like asthma, trouble breathing, or sleep apnea; high levels of carbon dioxide in the blood; or stomach or bowel block or narrowing.
- If you have any of these health problems: Kidney disease or liver disease.
- If you have taken certain drugs for depression or Parkinson's disease in the last 14 days. This includes isocarboxazid, phenelzine, tranylcypromine, selegiline, or rasagiline. Very high blood pressure may happen.
- If you are taking any of these drugs: Buprenorphine, butorphanol, linezolid, methylene blue, nalbuphine, or pentazocine.

Cheek tablet:

- If have sores in your mouth, talk with your doctor.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

All products:

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert until you see how this drug affects you.
- To lower the chance of feeling dizzy or passing out, rise slowly if you have been sitting or lying down. Be careful going up and down stairs.
- If you have been taking this drug for a long time or at high doses, it may not work as well and you may need higher doses to get the same effect. This is known as tolerance. Call your doctor if this drug stops working well. Do not take more than ordered.
- Long-term or regular use of opioid drugs like this drug may lead to dependence. Lowering the dose or stopping this drug all of a sudden may cause a greater risk of withdrawal or other severe problems. Talk to your doctor before you lower the dose or stop this drug. You will need to follow your doctor's instructions. Tell your doctor if you have more pain, mood changes, thoughts of suicide, or any other bad effects.
- Do not take more than what your doctor told you to take. Do not take more often or for longer than you were told. Doing any of these things may raise the chance of severe side effects.
- Do not take this drug with other strong pain drugs or if you are using a pain patch without talking to your doctor first.
- If your pain gets worse, if you feel more sensitive to pain, or if you have new pain after you take this drug, call your doctor right away. Do not take more than ordered.
- If you drink grapefruit juice or eat grapefruit often, talk with your doctor.
- Do not take with alcohol or products that have alcohol. Unsafe and sometimes deadly effects may happen.

- This drug may raise the chance of seizures in some people, including people who have had seizures in the past. Talk to your doctor to see if you have a greater chance of seizures while taking this drug.
- Long-term use of an opioid drug may lead to lower sex hormone levels. Call your doctor if you have a lowered interest in sex, fertility problems, no menstrual period, or ejaculation problems.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.
- Tell your doctor if you are breast-feeding. This drug passes into breast milk and may harm your baby. Get medical help right away if your baby seems very sleepy, is limp, or has trouble breathing.

Lozenge:

- Take good care of your teeth. See a dentist often.
- If you have high blood sugar (diabetes), talk with the doctor. Some of these products have sugar.

Skin patch (Duragesic):

- The patch may have metal. Take off the patch before an MRI.

What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

WARNING/CAUTION: Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

All products:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or

swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.

- Signs of low blood sugar like dizziness, headache, feeling sleepy, feeling weak, shaking, a fast heartbeat, confusion, hunger, or sweating.
- Severe dizziness or passing out.
- Feeling confused.
- Severe constipation or stomach pain. These may be signs of a severe bowel problem.
- Trouble breathing, slow breathing, or shallow breathing.
- Noisy breathing.
- Breathing problems during sleep (sleep apnea).
- Chest pain.
- Fast or slow heartbeat.
- Seizures.
- Depression.
- Trouble controlling body movements.
- Swelling in the arms or legs.
- Change in eyesight.
- A severe and sometimes deadly problem called serotonin syndrome may happen if you take this drug with certain other drugs. Call your doctor right away if you have agitation; change in balance; confusion; hallucinations; fever; fast or abnormal heartbeat; flushing; muscle twitching or stiffness; seizures; shivering or shaking; sweating a lot; severe diarrhea, upset stomach, or throwing up; or severe headache.
- Taking an opioid drug like this drug may lead to a rare but severe adrenal gland problem. Call your doctor right away if you feel very tired or weak, you pass out, or you have severe dizziness, very upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite.

Cheek tablet:

- Mouth sores.
- Swelling in the feet or hands.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

All products:

- Feeling dizzy, sleepy, tired, or weak.
- Dry mouth.
- Constipation, diarrhea, stomach pain, upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite.
- Headache.
- Feeling cold.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Sweating a lot.
- Irritation where this drug was used.

Cheek tablet:

- Mouth tingling.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

Injection:

- It is given as a shot.

Skin patch (Duragesic):

- Wash your hands before and after use.
- Touch the sticky side of the patch as little as possible.
- The patch has a lot of drug in it even after it is used. Carefully follow how to handle, store, and throw out this drug. Talk with the doctor.
- Take off old patch first.
- Put patch on clean, dry, healthy skin on the chest, back, upper leg, or upper arm.
- Put the patch in a new area each time you change the patch.
- If there is hair where you are putting the patch, clip the hair as close to the skin as you can. Do not shave the hair.
- Do not put on skin where you have just used creams, oils, lotions, or other skin products.
- Do not put the patch on the belt line, bra line, or skin folds.
- You do not need to put the patch on or near where you are having pain for it to work.
- You may bathe, shower, or swim for short periods after putting on the patch. Cover the patch with plastic wrap and tape to help keep it in place.
- If the patch falls off, put a new one on.
- If you have a problem with the patch not sticking, you may put first aid tape on the edges of the patch to hold it in place. If the patch still will not stick, you may put a see-through film dressing (like Bioclusive or Askina Derm) over the patch. Be sure you know what kind of see-through dressing you can

use. Do **not** cover the patch with any other bandage or tape.

- Do not cut or divide patches. Do not use patches that are damaged.
- Do not let the area where the patch was placed touch anyone else's skin.
- If the patch gets on someone else's skin, take it off right away. Wash the area with water and get medical help for that person right away. Getting this drug on another person's skin can cause severe side effects and even death.
- Misuse or abuse of this drug by placing it in the mouth or chewing, swallowing, injecting, or snorting it can lead to overdose and death.

Lozenge:

- Place lozenge in your mouth between the cheek and lower gum. Move it from side to side in your mouth using the handle.
- Suck oral lozenge. Do not chew, break, or crush it. Do not swallow it whole.
- After a dose, throw away the handle in the trash out of the reach of children and pets. If any drug is left on the handle, run it under hot water before throwing away to make sure the drug is dissolved.

Cheek tablet:

- Use right after opening.
- Place tablet in the mouth above a rear molar tooth between the upper cheek and gum and let dissolve. You may also place it under the tongue and let it dissolve.
- Do not chew, break, or crush.
- Do not eat or drink until this drug has dissolved all the way.
- If the drug has not dissolved all the way after 30 minutes, you can swallow the rest of it with water.
- Change the side of mouth with each dose.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

Skin patch (Duragesic):

- Put on a missed patch as soon as you think about it after taking off the old one.
- Do not apply double dose or extra doses.

Injection:

- Call your doctor to find out what to do.

All other products:

- If you use this drug on a regular basis, use a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not use 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.
- Many times this drug is taken on an as needed basis. Do not take more often than told by the doctor.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

Injection:

- If you need to store this drug at home, talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about how to store it.

All other products:

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.

Skin patch (Duragesic):

- After you take off a skin patch, be sure to fold the sticky sides of the patch to each other. Throw away used patches where children and pets cannot get to them.

All products:

- Store this drug in a safe place where children cannot see or reach it, and where other people cannot get to it. A locked box or area may help keep this drug safe. Keep all drugs away from pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. Check with your pharmacist. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- Drugs called naloxone and nalmefene can be used to help treat an overdose of this drug. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about how to get or use naloxone or nalmefene. If you think there has been an overdose, get medical care right away even if naloxone or nalmefene has been used. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms.

Last Reviewed Date

2026-01-22

Copyright

© 2026 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Fentanyl - Last updated on December 12, 2022
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center