Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# About Your Prescription Pain Medication

This information explains how to safely get and take your prescription pain medicine.

## About MSK's Anesthesia Pain Service

Your Anesthesia Pain Service care team will work with you to control your pain from your cancer treatments with and without medicine. This team includes doctors, advanced practice providers (APPs), registered nurses (RNs), and office and clinic coordinators. Examples of APPs include:

- Nurse practitioners (NPs).
- Physician assistants (PAs).
- Certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs).

The doctors and APPs work closely together. You may see a doctor, an APP, or both at the same time.

We can help control your pain by:

- Prescribing and adjusting pain medicine.

- Doing a nerve block procedure. This stops your nerves from sending pain messages to your brain.
- Implanting a device into your body to help relieve your pain.

These treatments may also be combined with other non-opioid medicine.

## Prescription pain medicine information

We want you to use the least amount of medicine needed to treat your pain. We also want you to take it for the shortest time possible. Follow these guidelines to safely take your pain medicine.

### How to get your pain medicine

- **Get your pain medicine from your pain doctor.** Other doctors may have prescribed you pain medicine in the past. Only your pain doctor should write your prescriptions for pain medicine. Do not ask other doctors to refill your pain medicine.
- **Do not miss your pain doctor appointments.** If you're getting opioids from us, we will need to see you in our clinic once a month. MSK has many Anesthesia Pain Service clinics. They are listed in the "Anesthesia Pain Service Locations" section at the end of this resource.
- **Keep track of when you will need a new prescription for**

**your pain medicine.** Pain medicine are only prescribed on business days (Monday through Friday). You will not be able to get a new prescription on a weekend or holiday.

- **Request a refill before your pain medicine is finished.** We will need time to process your request.

## How to take your pain medicine

- **Take your pain medicine only as prescribed by your pain doctor.** Do not take more than your pain doctor or nurse tells you to take. Taking more pain medicine than you're supposed to may lead to harmful side effects. This includes trouble breathing or even death.
- **If you have trouble breathing or become unconscious, someone must call 911 right away.**
- **Do not drink alcohol while taking opioids, sleeping medicine, or sedatives.** Sedatives are medicine to help you relax, such as lorazepam (Ativan®). All these medicine can make you drowsy (very sleepy). Alcohol can make the drowsiness worse.
- **Do not suddenly stop taking your pain medicine .** Stopping opioids suddenly can give you side effects from medicine withdrawal. This includes nausea, vomiting (throwing up), sweating, and abdominal cramps. Side effects do not mean you're addicted. It's a

normal reaction when you stop taking medicine too quickly. If this happens and you have no pain medicine, go to the nearest emergency room or the MSK Urgent Care Center (UCC).

  - The MSK UCC is on the 1st floor of Memorial Hospital. The closest entrance is 425 East 67th Street, between 1st and York Avenues.

- **Take at least a 1-day supply of your pain medicine with you when you leave your home.** This is to make sure you have your pain medicine with you in case of any emergency.
- **Some prescription pain medicine such as opioids can cause constipation (having fewer bowel movements than usual).** Talk with your pain doctor if you had constipation in the past. You may need a medicine to prevent constipation. For more information, read *How to Manage Constipation* (www.mskcc.org/pe/constipation).
  - Call your pain doctor or nurse if you:
    - Do not have a bowel movement (poop) for 2 days.
    - Have trouble passing stool.
    - Have hard stool.
    - Cannot empty your bowels completely.

## What to do if you miss a dose

- If you miss a dose of your pain medicine, do not take extra medicine.
- If you miss a dose and you're having pain, call your pain doctor. They will help you.

## How to make changes to your pain medicine

- **If you need any changes to your pain medicine, call the Anesthesia Pain Service at 212-639-6851**. If another doctor adjusts your pain medicine, call us by the next business day to discuss the change.
- **Do not change the dose of your pain medicine without talking with your pain doctor or nurse.** Read the section "How to Get Your Prescriptions Between Appointments" for more information.
- **Do not drive or do things you must be alert for until you know how your new medicine or dose affects you**. If your doctor changes your pain medicine or dose, you may need time to get used to it. Some prescription pain medicine can make you drowsy. You may also be at a greater risk of falling while getting used to your pain medicine or dose.
- **If you wish to lower the dose of your pain medicine, talk with your pain doctor.** They can help you safely lower

the amount of medicine you take. You may have withdrawal symptoms, but this is not common.

## Talk with your other healthcare providers about your pain medicine

- Let any other healthcare providers you see know you're taking pain medicine.
- Tell your healthcare providers if you take other medicine or dietary supplements, such as herbs, vitamins, or home remedies.
- If your other doctors prescribe sleeping medicine or sedatives, tell them you're also taking prescription pain medicine. Your pain doctors rarely prescribe sleeping medicine.

## How to store your prescription pain medicine

- **Keep your pain medicine away from others.** This includes children, pets, friends, family members, and visitors. Never share your medicine with another person or take another person's medicine.
- **Keep your pain medicine in a safe place, such as a locked box or locked cabinet.** Keeping them locked up will make sure that only you or the person they were prescribed for can take them.

## How to report lost or stolen prescriptions or pain medicine

Keep track of your pain medicine and prescriptions. Follow these steps if your medicine is lost or stolen.

1. Contact your local police station and file a police report.
2. Fax the police report to the Anesthesia Pain Service at 212-717-3206 or bring it to us in person.
3. Call your pain doctor. You may need to see them before they can give you a new prescription.
4. Your prescription plan may not pay for your replacement medicine. If it does not, you will need to pay for it.

## How to get rid of unused prescription pain medicine

If certain medicine are used by someone other than who they were prescribed for, they can be very harmful or fatal (deadly). This is why it's important to get rid of any unused prescription pain medicine.

The best way to get rid of these medicine is to flush them down the toilet. To see if your medicine should be flushed, visit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) flush list (www.bit.ly/3Am1Cei) or call 800-882-9539. To learn more, read *How to Get Rid of Unused Medicine* (www.mskcc.org/pe/get-rid-unused-medicine).

You can also ask your healthcare provider for a DisposeRx

kit. This kit has a powder that melts medicine into a gel that you can throw away in your regular trash.

## About taking opioids

Opioids are strong painkillers prescribed to help with moderate to severe pain. They're also called narcotics. Opioids are a controlled substance. This means they can be addictive. Using them too much or in the wrong way can lead to a strong, harmful need to keep using them. For that reason, you must treat controlled substances differently than other medicine. To learn more, read *Safe Opioid Use: What You Need to Know* (www.mskcc.org/pe/opioids).

If you're taking opioids, we want to make sure you're taking a safe amount. We will ask you for a urine (pee) sample at your first visit with your pain doctor. Your urine will be checked for medicine and other drugs to make sure you're safe during your treatment. We also review a state-wide registry before writing prescriptions for controlled substances. This will be done routinely during your care.

### About naloxone (Narcan®)

If prescribed opioids, you may also get a prescription for naloxone (Narcan). This is an emergency medicine tha can reverse or block an opioid overdose if you take more opioids than we prescribe you.

If you get naloxone, your healthcare provider will teach you and your caregiver how and when to use it. If you follow your healthcare provider's instructions for taking your medicine, you will not need to take naloxone.

Naloxone should be used only in an emergency where your breathing slows down or stops. Always call 911 after using naloxone. Its effects only last 30 to 90 minutes, and you may need more medical care. If you're unsure if you should use naloxone, call 911, and follow the operator's instructions. To learn more, read *About Naloxone (Narcan®)* (www.mskcc.org/pe/naloxone).

## How to get your prescriptions between appointments

- Call your pain doctor or nurse at least 4 to 5 business days (Monday through Friday) before you're out of medicine.
- Do not wait until you finished your medicine to call. Refilling your prescription may take a few days. If you wait until you run out of medicine, you may miss a dose.
- All prescriptions are sent to your pharmacy electronically (over the Internet). Your doctor cannot call these prescriptions into your pharmacy.

You can call the Anesthesia Pain Service at 212-639-6851,

Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. If you call after 3 p.m., your doctor may not call you back until the next business day.

**Your doctor cannot refill your prescription on Saturday, Sunday, or after 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. The office is closed, and the service is covered for emergencies only.**

## Steps to refill your pain medicine prescription

1. When you call your pain doctor or nurse to request your refill, they will ask you for the following information:
    - The name of your medicine.
    - The dose of your medicine.
    - The pharmacy you want the prescription sent to.
    - Your phone number so they can contact you if they have questions.
2. Your doctor will check a statewide registry before writing the prescription. If they have questions about how you're using the medicine, they may talk with you before they refill your prescription.
3. Then, your doctor must sign off on the new prescription. This may not happen until the end of the day.
4. Once your doctor signs off on the prescription, it's sent to your pharmacy electronically.

5. Once your pharmacy gets the prescription, they must check with your insurance company to make sure it's covered. Sometimes, your insurance company will have questions before they let the pharmacy process the prescription.
    - Your medicine may need prior authorization from your insurance company. It may take 1 to 3 days to get approval or denial. If it's denied, your doctor will need to prescribe a different pain medicine.
6. Your pharmacy will refill your prescription. If they do not have your medicine in stock, they may need to order the medicine.

## How to contact the Anesthesia Pain Service

### By phone

If you have questions, need to talk to someone about your pain control, or want to make an appointment, call 212-639-6851. You can reach us Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. If it's after 4 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000 and ask for the anesthesia pain person on call.

We will ask you to leave your phone number so we can call you back. It's best to call earlier in the day. That gives us time to review your records or talk with your pain doctor, if needed. We will do our best to call you back the same day

or the next business day.

If it's after 4 p.m. and you have an emergency, such as severe pain, call 212-639-2000. Ask for the anesthesia pain person on call. You can also go to your local emergency room or the MSK UCC.

### Through MSK MyChart

You can also contact the Anesthesia Pain Service through our secure patient portal, MSK MyChart (mskmychart.mskcc.org). You can send us a message through MSK MyChart to ask for medicine refills or questions about your care. We only review messages during business hours. They are not checked after 4 p.m., on the weekends, or holidays.

### By fax

If you need to send a fax to the Anesthesia Pain Service, the fax number is 212-717-3206.

## Anesthesia Pain Service locations

The Anesthesia Pain Service has offices at many locations:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Memorial Hospital**<br>1275 York Ave. (between East 67th and East 68th streets)<br>New York, NY 10065 | **MSK Westchester**<br>500 Westchester Ave.<br>West Harrison, NY 10604 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **MSK Commack Nonna's Garden Foundation Center**<br>650 Commack Road<br>Commack, NY 11725 | **MSK Basking Ridge**<br>136 Mountain View Blvd.<br>Basking Ridge, NJ 07920 |
| **MSK Monmouth**<br>480 Red Hill Road<br>Middletown, NJ 07748 | **MSK Bergen**<br>225 Summit Ave.<br>Montvale, NJ 07645 |
| **MSK Koch**<br>530 E. 74th St.<br>New York, NY 10021 | **MSK Nassau**<br>1101 Hempstead Turnpike<br>Uniondale, NY 11553 |

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

About Your Prescription Pain Medication - Last updated on January 31, 2025

All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center