

Is it safe to use Fentanyl? How to use Fentanyl safely?

Fentanyl is a potent synthetic opioid analgesic that is similar to morphine but 50-100 times more powerful. It is a prescription drug typically used to treat patients with severe pain or to manage pain after surgery. When prescribed by a physician, fentanyl is administered through an injection, transdermal patch, or in lozenges.

When used properly, fentanyl has many benefits for patients.

When opioids are prescribed properly, used for control of pain and also watched closely for the effect, then serious problems are uncommon.

Addiction and overdose are uncommon. They happen when the medicine is:

- ) Inappropriately prescribed.
- ) Not properly overseen by the health care team.
- ) Misused.
- ) Instructions aren't followed properly.

### Using fentanyl patches

Fentanyl is commonly used within a patch that is placed on the skin; this is called a transdermal patch.

Fentanyl patches should:

- ) ONLY be used to treat long-term stable pain that is well managed with current medications.
- ) ONLY be used with people who have previously taken consistent doses of opioids for at least 7 days.
- ) NOT be used for someone who is opioid-naïve or has intermittent or acute pain.

### Cautions using fentanyl patches

- ) fentanyl blood levels rise slowly - continue previous medication for 24 hours
- ) fentanyl blood levels fall slowly on removal - there is prolonged toxicity in overdose
- ) fentanyl has a long half-life - increase dose only every third day
- ) ensure that analgesia for breakthrough pain is always available
- ) avoid heat pads near a patch - these increase absorption and hence the risk of overdosage

### Notes:

- ) Fentanyl patches are available in different dose strength (\*12, 25, 50, 75 and 100 mcg/hour). Strength of patch is proportional to the patch size. (i.e. 25 mcg patch is larger than 12 mcg, and smaller than 50 mcg patch)
- ) after application of the first patch, plasma levels rise for 24 hours, analgesic levels are reached by 6-12 hours and a steady state is reached by the time of application of the second patch
- ) the patch should be replaced every 3 days (72 hours)
- ) on removal, a depot of fentanyl remains in the skin for 24 hours, falling by 50% after 17 hours

### Practicalities:

- ) patients converting from 4 hourly normal release morphine will require continued regular morphine until peak plasma levels of fentanyl are reached, i.e. the first 12 to 24 hours
- ) patients converting from 12 hourly modified release morphine should apply the patch at the same time as taking the final 12 hourly tablet
- ) a normal release opioid preparation should always be available for breakthrough pain (equivalent to 4 hourly morphine dose)
- ) the patient should be warned that they may experience more breakthrough pain in the first 1 to 3 days
- ) the dose of fentanyl patch should not be changed within the first two days of the first application or any change in dose
- ) replace the patches at the same time every 3 days (\*72 hours)
- ) vary the site of application with each change
- ) apply to a clean, dry, undamaged, non-hairy, flat areas of skin
- ) never apply heat over the patch as this will increase absorption
- ) during the change over some patients (10%) experience transient symptoms of morphine withdrawal including depression, diarrhoea, sweating and sympathetic over-activity. This can usually be improved with a small dose of oral morphine.

## Instructions for Patients and Carers

### Instructions and precautions:

- ) Prior to application, clean the skin with water (no soap), allow it to dry completely, and clip hair if necessary (do not shave the area)
- ) Apply the patch to unbroken skin on the chest, back, flank, or upper arm; do not apply to areas getting radiation therapy
- ) Firmly press the patch in place and hold for 30 seconds
- ) Change the patch every 72 hours (or 48 hours if directed by your doctor)
- ) Remove the old patch and clean the site; apply a new patch to a different site
- ) Avoid heat on the site of the patch (e.g., heating pad, electric blanket, hot tub, sun)
- ) Have a family member watch you closely for side effects during the first 24 hours of wearing the first patch or if your doctor increases your dose

### Side effects to report to doctor / nurse **immediately:**

- ) Shallow or very slow breathing,
- ) rapid heartbeat,
- ) Bad headache,
- ) confusion, significant dizziness, drowsiness,
- ) poor coordination, blurred vision,
- ) sweating, nausea, vomiting