

## A CAREGIVERS'S GUIDE TO GIVING ORAL MORPHINE AT HOME

Oral morphine is a strong painkiller which is given to someone with high levels of pain which need to be actively managed.

Morphine should always be given by **the mouth (orally)** and by **the clock (regularly, every 4 hours)**. Your healthcare provider will prescribe how much morphine you should use. Take care to follow these instructions precisely.

### How much and when to take your morphine:

1. Take the dose prescribed every 4 hours by the clock.
2. Take an extra half dose (half of the 4-hourly dose) in between as needed. This dose can be repeated at any stage between the 4 hourly scheduled doses. This extra dose is called the break through dose.
3. Continue taking the prescribed 4 hourly dose by the clock. (6am, 10am, 2pm, 6pm, 10pm, 2am)
4. At the end of the 24-hour period, add up all the doses taken and then divide by 6. That gives the new 4 hourly dose.  
For example, if the 4 hourly dose is 10ml and 4 extra doses of 5 ml have been taken, the total after 24 hours is 80ml (6x10 plus 4x5= 80). The new 4 hourly dose is now 14 ml (80 divided by 6 rounded up to next whole number, that is 14ml). The break through dose is now 7 ml.

### How to measure out a dose of morphine:

1. Pour a small amount of the morphine liquid from the bottle into a cup.
2. Draw up your dose into a syringe (no needle) to measure out the correct amount.
3. Drop the liquid into the person's mouth using the syringe.
4. Return any unused morphine from the cup to the bottle.

It is important not to stop your morphine suddenly. Always discuss changes to the dosage with your healthcare provider.

### Side effects:

Morphine sometimes causes some of the following side effects.

- Nausea - this usually goes away after the first few days, but can be unpleasant. Medicines can be given to control it.
- Constipation - your healthcare provider will prescribe various treatments to ensure that you continue to have regular bowel movements.
- Dry mouth - take regular sips of water.
- Drowsiness - this usually lessens after a few days, but if it persists or gets worse, the dose can be adjusted by your healthcare provider.
- Sweating or muscle jerks - tell your healthcare provider if you experience either of these side effects.

If the pain is getting worse, inform your healthcare provider so that the dose can be increased or additional medicines can be added.

Source: WHO. Palliative Care: Symptom Management and End-Of-Life Care. (2003)