

# Returning home after taking an analgesic (opioid)



When you receive an opioid analgesic (painkiller), it helps relieve pain during a treatment or an examination. However, it causes side effects afterwards that you need to take into account for 3 to 4 hours. This fact sheet explains how to manage those.

## Information on the medication received

Medication, dosage, and how it was given:

.....  
.....  
.....

Time given:

.....

**An opioid is active over a period of 3 to 4 hours. Take time to read this fact sheet before leaving the hospital. You'll understand better why you should follow certain safety rules.**



## Do I need to take any precautions in my activities?

Over the next few hours, your walking could be less steady than usual. If this happens, take the arm of your companion.

You may feel weak and dizzy, and have difficulty coordinating your movements, judging distances, and responding to your surroundings. You may also be less careful than usual.



**If you have any questions when you get home, don't hesitate to call your pharmacist or Info-Santé at 8-1-1.**

These effects generally last a few hours. Avoid falls and accidents by doing quiet activities, such as reading or watching TV.

While you are impaired by the medication, avoid manual labor and dangerous tools, and don't sign important documents.



## Can I drive?

A person taking an opioid for the first time or occasionally **cannot drive a car**. The medication may cause drowsiness and impair your alertness, judgment, and concentration. Ask a relative or friend to take you home by car, public transportation, taxi, or on foot. If you don't have a companion, you can take a taxi or stay in the waiting room longer before going home.

## Are there other side effects?

You could:

- become sleepy
- feel dizzy
- feel nauseous
- have an urge to scratch (itchiness)
- become constipated
- feel confused or have hallucinations (this effect is most common in the elderly and those whose health is fragile)



## Are there products I should avoid?

Never take opioids at the same time as other products that can put you to sleep or make your breathing slower and less deep.

Don't take alcohol, cannabis, or certain over-the-counter products such as antihistamines. They increase drowsiness and the risk of falling. Even if you usually take sleeping pills to sleep, it's best not to take them if you're already very sleepy.

## When should I look for help?

It's very rare that a painkiller would cause a serious situation at home. One such serious situation is respiratory depression (slow and shallow breathing).

To be safe, your companion should be able to recognize the danger signals of respiratory depression.

### Danger signals

- > Your breathing is very slow (8 breaths or less per minute).
- > Your companion can't wake you.
- > Your skin is bluish or grayish.

### What to do

- > Call **9-1-1** immediately.
- > Give this fact sheet to the paramedics to indicate the opioid you received.
- > Your companion should stimulate you by talking to you very loudly, removing your blankets, or putting a cold water towel on your neck.



### USEFUL RESOURCES

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website  
[chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante](http://chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante)

*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal  
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