Pain relief after shoulder surgery

You have had surgery on your shoulder today. Shoulder operations can cause significant pain, especially during the first few days after the operation. Taking pain relief medicines regularly will help keep the pain to a minimum.

The following guide explains how to take your pain relief medicines so that your pain is well controlled.

There is good evidence to show that if your pain is well controlled you will recover more quickly.

Looking after your numb arm
When you go home from hospital you will have a numb arm and a pain-free shoulder. This is the effect of the local anaesthetic injection that you had before the start of your surgery.

This numbness will last for between 12 and 30 hours. While your arm is numb, it is very important that you support it in a sling until normal sensation and strength return. You should also protect it from heat, excessive pressure and extremes of movement.

The pain relief medicines that you will receive
You will be given some or all of the following types of pain relief medicine to take at home:

- Paracetamol
- Ibuprofen
- Dihydrocodeine
- Gabapentin
- Liquid morphine

How to take your pain relief medicines
- It is very important that you start taking your pain relief medicines before the numbness in your arm wears off.
- For the first five days after your surgery you should take your pain relief medicines regularly.
- The different pain relief medicines are most effective when taken in combination, so that the pain is tackled from many different angles.
Timing of your pain relief medicines
On the day of your surgery

At bedtime:
Your arm may still be numb but you should take the following pain relief medicines at bedtime (this will ensure that they are working when the numbness wears off):

- Paracetamol (2 x 500mg tablets)
- Ibuprofen (400mg tablet)*
- Gabapentin (600mg tablet)*

For the next five days (days one to five)
You should aim to take your pain relief medicines at the times shown on the table on the next page. You may wish to use the columns to help you record and keep track of what you have taken.

- Try to stick to these timings if you can, but don’t worry if you miss a dose. Just wait until the next time slot and then take the tablets that are listed there.
- Paracetamol: always leave at least four hours between doses of your paracetamol.
- Ibuprofen*: always take your ibuprofen with or just after food.
- Dihydrocodeine 30 – 60mg: take one or two tablets of dihydrocodeine at the times shown on the chart. Whether you take one or two tablets will depend on your level of pain. These medicines may make you drowsy. Stop or reduce the frequency of these tablets if this becomes troublesome. These medicines may cause constipation so drink plenty of water and increase your fibre intake to help prevent this.
- Gabapentin: you will have taken 600mg on the night of your surgery. Take the smaller dose of 300mg for the next five days. Gabapentin may make you feel drowsy so it’s best to take it at night, as shown on the chart.

When to take your liquid morphine*
You can take your liquid morphine at any time of the day or night if you are still uncomfortable after taking your paracetamol, ibuprofen* and dihydrocodeine. You should not exceed the maximum safe dose as stated on the label.

**Day six onwards: how to reduce your pain relief medicines
After the first five days and as your pain settles, you should begin to reduce your pain relief medicines.

Reduce the dihydrocodeine first, aiming to stop this by the end of day six. Reduce your ibuprofen* intake over the next two to three days, then reduce your paracetamol intake when you feel comfortable enough to do so.

What to do with leftover pain relief medicines
Never give your prescribed tablets to other people, as they may not be safe for them to take. You can take leftover medicines to your local pharmacy for safe disposal. Please also keep all medicines out of reach of children.

*if this medicine has been prescribed for you

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### Pain relief medicine

**Record here what you have taken each day:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Pain relief medicine</th>
<th>Day one</th>
<th>Day two</th>
<th>Day three</th>
<th>Day four</th>
<th>Day five</th>
<th>See note above**</th>
<th>Day six</th>
<th>Day seven</th>
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<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Paracetamol 2 x 500mg</td>
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</table>

*if this medicine has been prescribed for you

### Anaesthetic department
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Main switchboard: **023 8077 7222**

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If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone **023 8120 4688** for help.

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