

Managing Acute Pain After Surgery - Tylenol & Opioids

What pain can I expect after surgery?

It is normal to have some pain after surgery. The goal of managing your acute pain after surgery is to minimize your pain enough to feel comfortable getting up, taking deep breaths, wash, get dressed, and do simple tasks in your home. Pain is usually worst the first 24-48 hours.

What can I do to relieve pain without medications?

Rest, elevation, ice, and heat can greatly reduce the amount of pain after surgery. Ask your surgeon for more specific instructions for your type of surgery.



Some may find activities that refocus your mind such as mindful breathing, music, meditation and guided imagery to be helpful in reducing pain and possibly the amount of pain medicine you will need to take to control it.

How will I use medications to relieve pain?



The best strategy for controlling your pain after surgery is **around the clock** pain control with prescription-strength Tylenol (acetaminophen). This means that you will take a prescribed dose of Tylenol on a set schedule rather than taking it as needed when you feel pain.

Alternating Tylenol with other pain management techniques allows you to maximize your pain control. In addition to Tylenol, you can use heating pads or

ice packs on your incisions to help reduce your pain. These may be purchased at your local pharmacy and are typically located in the back pain aisle.

How will I take prescription strength pain medication Around-The-Clock?

You will take acetaminophen every six hours.

- Take 1000 milligram (mg) of acetaminophen (2 pills of 500 mg) every 6 hours scheduled for 3 days
- After that, take acetaminophen every six hours as needed for breakthrough pain

See example - if your first dose of Acetaminophen is at 5:00 PM

5:00 PM	acetaminophen 1000 mg
11:00 PM	acetaminophen 1000 mg
5:00 AM	acetaminophen 1000 mg
11:00 AM	acetaminophen 1000 mg
Continue for 3 days, then take as needed thereafter	

We recommend that you follow this schedule Around-The-Clock for 3 days after surgery, or until you feel that it is no longer needed.

What if I still have pain that interferes with my ability to function?

If you have pain that is not controlled with prescription-strength acetaminophen (Tylenol) you might have what we call “breakthrough” pain. You also received a prescription for a small amount of a very effective pain medication such as Oxycodone, Morphine, or Hydromorphone. Use these opioid pills in the first 24 hours after surgery if you have breakthrough pain. **Do not take more than 1 opioid pill every 4-6 hours.**

What are the maximum doses per day for acetaminophen?

Take the medication as you are instructed by your doctor.

- Do not take more than 4000 milligrams (mg) of acetaminophen in a 24

hour period from all sources. That's the same as eight 500 mg pills.

What are the risks of pain medications?

- **Acetaminophen** taking more than 4 grams (4000 milligrams or mg) of acetaminophen per day may cause serious injury to your liver and kidneys.
- **Oxycodone, Morphine, or Hydromorphone** may cause upset stomach, indigestion, or constipation, among other side effects. Taking the medication with food or milk may help avoid these effects.

Where should I store prescription medications?

Store prescription medications out of sight and reach of children, teens, and pets.

- Store in private areas rather than common rooms like bathrooms or kitchens.
- Lock up the pills if possible.
- Keep a count of how many pills you have left.

How should I dispose of prescription medications?

The safest way to dispose of old medications is to return them.

You can take them to an authorized "Take-Back" program. Visit <http://michmed.org/5LWpZ> to find a location in your area.

If you have a medication disposal envelope, you can safely mail back unused pills by sealing them in the envelope. Then place the envelope in the mail or, if you have a drug disposal kit, you can follow instructions on the kit to dispose of the unused pills.

If you are not able to do any of these, then follow these steps as a last resort:

- Mix pills (do not crush) with used coffee grounds or kitty litter in a plastic bag and put in your household trash.

- Scratch out personal information on the prescription label and dispose of the original container.



Do not flush pills down the toilet.

Who do I call if I have any questions or problems?

Call your surgeon's office if you have any questions, problems or if you are still having pain after 7 days.

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