

Managing Acute Pain after Surgery

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.



Distracting activities such as mindful breathing, for example music, meditation and guided imagery may be helpful to reduce pain and possibly the amount of pain medicine you will need to take to control it.

How will I use medications to relieve pain?



Research has shown that **Around-The-Clock dosing** of pain medications is very effective to control pain after surgery. This means that you will take a dose of pain-relieving medication on a set schedule rather than taking them as needed when you feel pain.

On this schedule, you will alternate pain medications Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and Ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil® and others). Some patients will also use opioid pain medication (narcotic) if their doctor prescribes it. If you have a medical condition that prohibits you from taking Acetaminophen and/or Ibuprofen talk with your doctor.

How will I alternate pain medication Around-The-Clock?

You will take a dose of pain medication every three hours.

- Start by taking 650 milligram (mg) of Acetaminophen (2 pills of 325 mg)
- 3 hours later take 600 mg of Ibuprofen (3 pills of 200 mg)
- 3 hours after taking the Ibuprofen take 650 mg of Acetaminophen
- 3 hours after that take 600 mg of Ibuprofen.

See example - if your first dose of Acetaminophen is at 12:00 PM

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 12:00 PM | Acetaminophen 650 mg (2 pills of 325 mg) |
| 3:00 PM | Ibuprofen 600 mg (3 pills of 200 mg) |
| 6:00 PM | Acetaminophen 650 mg (2 pills of 325 mg) |
| 9:00 PM | Ibuprofen 600 mg (3 pills of 200 mg) |
| Continue alternating every 3 hours | |

We recommend that you follow this schedule Around-The-Clock for at least 3 days after surgery, or until you feel that it is no longer needed. (Use the table on page 5 of this handout to keep track of the medications you are taking.)

What are the risks of pain medications?

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

What if my doctor prescribes an opioid for me?

You may receive a prescription for opioid pain medication for break-through pain. “Break-through pain” means pain that is not controlled by Around-The-Clock acetaminophen and ibuprofen. Examples of opioids include Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, and others. Opioids are potent medications that provide good pain relief but their side-effects may cause harm.

If your doctor prescribes an opioid pain medication you can **replace** one of the acetaminophen or ibuprofen doses with a dose of the opioid.

For example, your schedule could look like this:

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 12:00 PM | Acetaminophen 650 mg (2 pills of 325 mg) |
| 3:00 PM | Ibuprofen 600 mg (3 pills of 200 mg) |
| 6:00 PM | Oxycodone 5mg (1 pill of 5 mg) |
| 9:00 PM | Ibuprofen 600 mg (3 pills of 200 mg) |
| 12:00 AM | Acetaminophen 650 mg (2 pills of 325 mg) |
| Continue alternating every 3 hours | |

Important:

- If your pain is manageable, avoid taking opioids.
- Never take more frequent or higher doses than prescribed

Visit <http://michmed.org/ea93D> to learn more about taking opioids safely.

Warning: Some opioid pain medications **also contain acetaminophen** in addition to the opioid. Check the label to see if your medication contains acetaminophen and if it does make sure you **count this amount in daily intake** which is less than 4000mg of acetaminophen in a 24-hour period.

Where should I store opioid medications?

Store opioids out of sight and reach of children, teens, and pets.

- Store opioids 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 unused opioids?

The safest way to dispose of old medications is to take them to an authorized “Take-Back” program. Visit <http://michmed.org/5LWpZ> to find a location in your area.

If you are not able to find a program in your area follow these steps as a last resort:

- Mix opioids (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 opioids 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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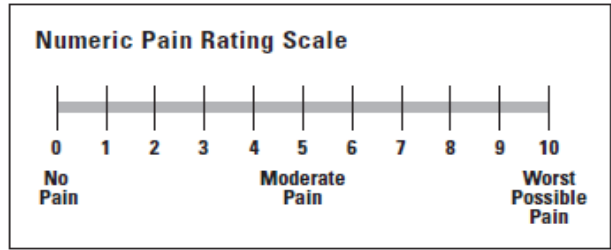
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Use this table to keep track of the medications you are taking.

Share it with your doctor if your pain is not well controlled.

Use this scale to rate your pain level.



| Day 1 | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------|
| Time | Name of Medication | Number of pills taken | Amount of Acetaminophen (in mg) | Pain Level | Comments |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| Total Daily amount of Acetaminophen | | | | | |
| Do not take more than 4,000 mg per day | | | | | |

| Day 2 | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------|
| Time | Name of Medication | Number of pills taken | Amount of Acetaminophen (in mg) | Pain Level | Comments |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| Total Daily amount of Acetaminophen | | | | | |
| Do not take more than 4,000 mg per day | | | | | |

| Day 3 | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------|
| Time | Name of Medication | Number of pills taken | Amount of Acetaminophen (in mg) | Pain Level | Comments |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| Total Daily amount of Acetaminophen Do not take more than 4,000 mg per day | | | | | |

| Day 4 | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------|
| Time | Name of Medication | Number of pills taken | Amount of Acetaminophen (in mg) | Pain Level | Comments |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| Total Daily amount of Acetaminophen Do not take more than 4,000 mg per day | | | | | |

| Day 5 | | | | | |
|--------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------|
| Time | Name of Medication | Number of pills taken | Amount of Acetaminophen (in mg) | Pain Level | Comments |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| Total Daily amount of Acetaminophen Do not take more than 4,000 mg per day | | | | | |

| Day 6 | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------|
| Time | Name of Medication | Number of pills taken | Amount of Acetaminophen (in mg) | Pain Level | Comments |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| Total Daily amount of Acetaminophen Do not take more than 4,000 mg per day | | | | | |

| Day 7 | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------|
| Time | Name of Medication | Number of pills taken | Amount of Acetaminophen (in mg) | Pain Level | Comments |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| AM PM | | | | | |
| Total Daily amount of Acetaminophen Do not take more than 4,000 mg per day | | | | | |

If you are still having pain after 7 days of around the clock medications contact your surgeon's office.