

Patient information

Managing pain relief after caesarean section

This leaflet is intended for all women discharged home on dihydrocodeine following caesarean section.

Recovery after caesarean section can be painful because you have undergone major abdominal surgery. The aim of pain medicine after caesarean section is to allow you to move around, deep breathe, cough, and look after your new baby.

Please ensure that you already have your own simple pain medicines at home (paracetamol and ibuprofen). Both are safe for you and your baby unless you have been told there might be a health risk to you (contraindication).

If your pain is not managed with regular simple pain medicines in hospital, you will be prescribed dihydrocodeine to take home. If you and baby have been reviewed and are ready, then you can go home on day 1 after your caesarean section. If you are discharged after day 1, then your midwife will discuss your pain medicine requirements with you prior to discharge.

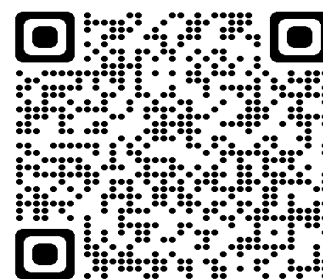
What is dihydrocodeine?

Dihydrocodeine belongs to the family of opioid pain medicines which include morphine, codeine, tramadol and oxycodone. These drugs help reduce pain by acting on areas in the spinal cord and brain to block the pain signals. Dihydrocodeine is a strong pain medicine and is used following major surgery and serious injury.

Can I still breastfeed?

Breastfeeding has significant health benefits for mum and baby.

All the opioid pain medicines will pass into breast milk in differing amounts. If you and baby are well and you are not feeling too sleepy, **you can still breastfeed** while taking dihydrocodeine. If your baby becomes drowsy while you are taking dihydrocodeine, please seek medical help.



For more information about pain medicines and breastfeeding, please refer to the following website: www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/analgesics/ or access the QR code (above).

What dose should I take?

Dihydrocodeine should be used as prescribed by your hospital doctor. It should be taken **as well as** your regular simple pain medicines (paracetamol and ibuprofen).

This helps you to use it at the **lowest effective dose** and for the **shortest possible time** while your body heals.

Remember, never take more doses than you have been prescribed. If you are in unexpected, severe pain despite your medicines, then please seek medical help.

What are the side effects?

Opioid pain medicines can cause the following when taken for long periods of time:

- Constipation
- Itching
- Weight gain
- Addiction
- Tolerance (to the medicine)
- Immune system depression
- Hyperalgesia (the pain feels worse)
- Difficulty breathing.

To reduce constipation from dihydrocodeine, you will also be prescribed a laxative. This should be used whilst you are taking dihydrocodeine.

How do I stop taking dihydrocodeine?

Following discharge from hospital, you should **aim to stop dihydrocodeine within three days**. Then you can slowly stop your other simple pain medicines (ibuprofen and paracetamol) as you feel able.

If you find you need dihydrocodeine for longer, please contact your GP or midwife for advice.

Step 1: stop dihydrocodeine

Dihydrocodeine should be stopped as soon as movement allows. This is usually within three days of discharge. Aim to take it less often each day after your discharge home.

Prolonged use of opioid pain medication causes health problems.

Step 2: stop ibuprofen

When you are comfortable without dihydrocodeine, start taking fewer doses of ibuprofen.

Long-term use can cause kidney damage, stomach ulcers and bleeding.

Step 3: stop paracetamol

This is the last pain medicine you should stop.

What is an overdose?

Taking too much dihydrocodeine can result in an overdose, which could be very serious and result in death.

Your family, friends and carers should know the signs so they can take immediate action.

Signs of an overdose include:

- Confusion or hallucinations
- Unresponsive or unconscious
- Difficulty breathing or no breathing
- Slurred speech
- Lips or fingernails are blue or purple
- Very small pupils in eyes
- Poor coordination/balance.

If you think that you or someone else has taken an overdose of dihydrocodeine dial 999 immediately.

Important opioid safety messages

- Do not share your medicine with others
- Keep out of reach of children and pets
- Opioids can affect driving - it may not be safe for you to drive (further information regarding opioid pain medicines and driving can be found on the website: www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law)
- Let your doctor know if you are taking other medicines that also make you feel drowsy
- Take leftover medicines to your pharmacy for disposal
- Opioids mixed with alcohol can make you feel drowsy.

Further guidance can be found in the West Suffolk Hospital pharmacy department **Information about your medications** leaflet.

References

- Bisson DL, Newell SD, Laxton C, on behalf of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. Antenatal and Postnatal Analgesia. Scientific Impact Paper No. 59. BJOG 2019; 126:e115–24.
- Hemmings HC, Lambert DG. The good, the bad and the ugly: the many faces of opioids. BJA 2019; 122 (6): 705-707.
- <https://www.sps.nhs.uk>. Which weak opioids can be used during breastfeeding? Considering the evidence for codeine, dihydrocodeine and tramadol.
- Levy N. Is dihydrocodeine the ideal opioid for use after discharge from hospital? British Journal of Pain 2022; 1-3.
- Mitchell J, Jones W, Winkley E and Kinsella SM. Guideline on anaesthesia and sedation in breastfeeding women. Anaesthesia 2020; 75: 1482-1483.
- West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust patient information leaflet: Stopping pain medication after hospital admission. Author: Pain Service.

Clinical research

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nsh.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)

<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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