



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# The use of fentanyl patches

Issued by the Pharmacy Department



## What is a fentanyl patch?

Fentanyl is the name of a drug used to treat moderate to severe pain. It is a strong painkiller related to morphine. The drug is contained within a sticky patch, and when applied to your body, gradually passes through your skin into your bloodstream. Once in your bloodstream, fentanyl acts within your body to relieve your pain. It is important that the person who is prescribing this medication knows about any other medication you are taking.

## Why have I been prescribed fentanyl patches?

Fentanyl is most useful in patients with 'stable' pain, which does not require many changes in medication doses. It is also prescribed for patients who have difficulty swallowing tablets, are unable to tolerate morphine or for those whose kidneys are not working so well.

## How do I use a fentanyl patch?

1. Change your fentanyl patch every 72 hours at roughly the same time of day
2. If you are using more than one fentanyl patch, then all the patches should be changed at the same time
3. Take your old patch(es) off, fold each patch in half so that it sticks together and put back in its original sachet. This can then be put into the bin with your household rubbish
4. Choose a place on the upper arm or upper body to stick the new patch. The skin should not have cuts, spots or other blemishes and not be too hairy. The area should also be dry and clean
5. Change/alternate the area where you stick the patch(es) so that one area is not used twice in a row

6. Peel the plastic backing off the new patch(es) and stick firmly onto the chosen area of skin. Choose the application site carefully and make sure that the patch is stuck, especially around the edges, by pressing it for 30 seconds
7. Wash your hands after applying the patch
8. Make sure you have another patch at home, ready for the next time it is due to be changed. If you need more patches, a prescription can be requested from your GP surgery
9. Store the medication in a safe and secure location (out of reach and sight of children, preferably in a locked cupboard)
10. Return any unwanted/unused medication to your community pharmacy for safe disposal

## **What should I do if I still get pain whilst I have a fentanyl patch on?**

Fentanyl patches provide a background of pain relief. As well as the patch you will also be given a quick acting pain killer in case you have pain despite the patch. Reasons you might get pain include;

- When you use fentanyl patches for the first time, or if your dose is increased, it can take a day or more for you to feel the maximum benefit.
- You may experience pain while doing a particular activity despite being on the patch e.g. washing, walking around a lot. If you know an activity is likely to cause you pain, you can take a dose of your quick acting pain relief before you do the activity.

- Sometimes you may experience pain without an obvious cause.

Follow the instructions on the label to know how much of your quick acting pain killer to take. If you require more than 2 or 3 doses of this extra pain killer a day, you must tell your doctor or palliative care nurse. They may advise you to increase the strength of your patch.

## **What should I do if the patch falls off or I forget to change it?**

Sometimes fentanyl patches do not stick very well to the skin. You may be given a dressing to keep it on by your GP/nurse.

If a patch does fall off, or you forget to change it, stick a new patch on as soon as you can and dispose of the old patch safely. You may find you need to use more of your 'when required' pain relief if the patch has been off for a long period of time.

If a patch transfers to another person, remove it and get medical help immediately (dial 999 and ask for an ambulance).

## **What side effects should I look out for?**

Different people may react differently to the same medication, but some of the things to watch out for include:

- **Drowsiness** – if you become unusually sleepy after starting on fentanyl patches, or after the dose has been changed, contact your GP/palliative care nurse/district nurse.
- **Skin rashes/irritation** – some people have an allergic reaction to the adhesive on the patch.

## Signs of fentanyl poisoning or overdose

In the most serious cases, accidental transfer of patches can result in a dangerous overdose. Signs of an overdose are:

- Shallow breathing
- Drowsiness
- Extreme sedation
- Small 'pin-prick' pupils in the eyes

If you are using a fentanyl patch and your breathing becomes shallow and weak, take the patch off and seek medical help immediately by dialling 999.

If a patch is swallowed, get medical help immediately (dial 999 and ask for an ambulance).

## What to do if you experience a side effect or reaction?

Fentanyl overdose or accidental exposure requires urgent medical attention.

Talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or healthcare professional if you have any concerns about your medicines or suspect you have had a side effect or an adverse reaction to a medicine.

## **Whilst you are on a fentanyl patch it is very important that you...**

DO NOT let anyone else use your patch.

DO NOT stick on any extra patches unless told to do so.

DO NOT cut or divide the patch (unless specifically instructed by a palliative care specialist)

DO NOT apply immediately after a bath/shower – allow the skin to cool first.

DO NOT apply direct heat to the area with the patch on e.g. hot water bottle.

DO NOT soak in a hot bath, use a sauna or sunbathe while using fentanyl patches.

DO seek help if you develop a fever. Try to keep your temperature down.

## **Different brands of patch**

There are a few different brands of fentanyl patch available. Where possible you will be given the same brand each time. However, if you notice that your patches look different from those you are used to using, ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice.

## Further Information

If you would like further information about fentanyl patches you will find a patient information leaflet in the box when you receive your medication.

If you have been prescribed a fentanyl patch for the relief of cancer pain further information can be obtained from Cancer Research UK.

Telephone - 0808 800 4040.

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Internet: [www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk)

Any further queries can be directed to your GP, pharmacist or the original prescriber.

The Palliative Care Team and Pharmacy Department can be contacted via Northumbria Healthcare NHS switchboard 0344 811 811.

If you have any concerns about the information provided in this leaflet please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) on freephone 0800 032 02 02, text 01670 511098 or e-mail [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk) .

## Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

## Other sources of information

### NHS 111

### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)

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