

Caring for the Hospice Patient

Information on the Side Effects of Pain Medication

The possible side effects of Morphine and Morphine-like medications include:

- **Nausea**: Occasionally, nausea with or without vomiting occurs when the medication is first started. The nausea should pass in 2-3 days as the patient's body adapts to the effects of the medications. Medications can be ordered to relieve the nausea.
- **Constipation**: Commonly occurs when pain medication is taken routinely. Laxatives and/or stool softeners should be used on a daily basis. Your nurse will provide instructions regarding the use of laxatives.
- **Drowsiness**: Initially may cause drowsy feeling or even sleeping more. Usually, this side effect clears in 2-3 days as the body adapts to the medication. Also the initial increase in sleep may simply be due to decreased pain and the ability to sleep. It is recommended that caregivers should be prepared to offer increased supervision and assistance as needed until the drowsiness subsides.

When to call the nurse: (At 815-732-2499, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year)

- No bowel movement for 3 days.
- Drowsiness, hard to arouse, drifts off to sleep during conversation.
- Nausea that affects intake of food and fluids.
- Questions about amount and/or times of medication administration.
- Pain is present, current medications are ineffective.

Please tell the nurse or doctor if the patient is having difficulty with medications. There are medications to help with side effects. Not all medications work for each patient. The doctor and nurses have experience with finding the right medications for your loved one.

Contact your nurse or doctor immediately if the patient experiences:

- Uncommon side effects including urinary retention, mental or mood changes, fast/slow or irregular heartbeat, seizures, confusion, severe dizziness or headache.
- Allergic reaction to medicine is unlikely, but would include rash, hives, itching, swelling of mouth, and sudden chest pain.

References: One Point Patient Care Pharmacy. 2014, Ferrell, Coyle. Oxford Textbook of Palliative Nursing, Second Edition. Oxford Press

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Facts About Haldol for Hospice Patients

Many people have concerns and fears about using the medication called Haldol/Haloperidol. You may have heard stories about someone in a hospital or nursing home that was “snowed” or “zonked” when they were given this medication. These stories lack medical information and details. Patients may have experienced undesirable side effects due to high doses of Haldol that were given for long periods of time.

Additionally, while the internet is a wonderful tool that makes looking up information on uses and side effects of any medication very easy, it frequently provides only general information that should not be applied to individual patient needs.

The physicians, pharmacists and nurses who provide care for Serenity Hospice and Home patients have received extensive training in how this medication works to alleviate symptoms and promote comfort. Our staff is very willing to answer any questions you may have about the use of Haldol for your loved one. Some of the facts about Haldol/Haloperidol include:

- Approved by the FDA in 1967.
- Classified as a “typical” antipsychotic agent used to treat certain mental conditions.
- On the World Health Organization Model List of Essential Medicines.
- Provides beneficial effects for treating hallucinations, delusions, fear, and agitation.
- Works by blocking dopamine neurotransmission, stabilizing cerebral function.
- Recommended as first-line treatment for delirium at end-of-life.

Guidelines For Administering Haldol:

- The lowest dose possible will be ordered by the physician.
- The medication will be given for the least amount of time.
- Haldol is available in liquid form for ease of administration.
- Follow the prescription directions carefully. If you are unable to give the medication as ordered, please call the hospice nurse at 815-732-2499 to explain the situation.
- Alcohol should not be used while taking this medication.

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Information on the Side Effects of Haldol

- Constipation, diarrhea, dizziness, dry mouth, headache, loss of appetite, restlessness, stomach upset, or trouble sleeping. Tell the nurse if patient is having any difficulties.
- An allergic reaction is unlikely, but seek immediate medical attention for rash, hives, itching, difficulty breathing, tightness in the chest, or swelling of face, lips, or tongue.
- **Contact the nurse immediately** if the patient experiences; blurred vision, chest pain, decreased or difficult urination, difficulty speaking or swallowing, unusual sweating, fainting, fast irregular heartbeat, or rigid or stiff muscles.

We understand the behaviors associated with delirium can be distressing for family and caregivers to observe. Serenity Hospice and Home team members are available to offer support. Visits from social workers, chaplains, grief companions, and volunteers can be arranged to give you education and to comfort you during this difficult time.



Haldol can improve the quality of life for patients at end of life

References:

Ferrell, Betty R. and Nessa Coyle eds. *Oxford Textbook of Palliative Nursing*, Second Edition. Oxford Press
Casarett, David, and Inouye, Sharon. *Delirium at the End of Life*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, Volume 137
Gordon, *Delirium*, *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Volume 10
Weissman, D.E. et.al. *Management of Terminal Delirium*, Medical College of Wisconsin, Inc.

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Medication Compliance (including controlled medications)

Taking medications properly can make a difference in the way a person feels. The physician has ordered the medications as part of a plan to provide comfort.

Regardless of the medication, the following points should be followed for safe and effective medication usage:

- **Read Labels Carefully.** Observe how much and how often.
- **Follow Directions.** Observe whether medication should be taken before meals, after meals, or with food.
- **Know About Medications.** Know what side effects can occur and report them to your Doctor.
- **Keep A Record.** Keep a simple list of medications and the times given. This is especially important if more than one person is involved in giving medications.
- **Discard Old Or Unused Medication.** Incorrect or outdated meds can be dangerous.
- **Store Medications In A Safe Place.** Store medications out of reach of children or visitors.
- **Do Not Take Over-The-Counter Medications.** Over-the-counter medications should be approved by your Doctor.
- **Do Not Share Your Medications.** Your Doctor has ordered medications for **the patient's** health problems.

