How to Manage Your Pain After Surgery, Trauma or Burn
What Can I Expect?

After surgery, traumatic injury or burn injury, some patients expect to take enough medicine to be completely pain free. However, that level of medicine can lead to serious side effects and long-term problems. It is safer to find the right amount of medicine to bring your pain to a level you can tolerate and function with. The goal is tolerable pain, not zero pain.

Types of Pain Medicine

There are many types of medicines that can help relieve your pain, such as Tylenol, ibuprofen, Aleve and Motrin. Please discuss use of these medicines with your doctor and follow label directions. Other medicines that relieve pain, such as morphine, dilaudid and oxycodone, are called opioids. Opioids are not necessarily better.

What’s Wrong with Opioids?

Abuse of opioids caused tens of thousands of people to die in the US last year alone.

Side effects of opioids

They have some serious side effects, and the risks increase the longer you use them and the higher the doses. At the least, taking opioids may cause you to feel:

• constipated
• itchy
• tired
• nauseated
Other serious risks of opioids
More importantly, Opioids may cause:
• addiction or dependence
• a life threatening overdose
• dizziness leading to falling and serious injury

If you are taking opioids
• Don’t drive or operate machinery
• Don’t drink alcohol
• If you are taking any other medicines, ask your doctor if they are safe to take with opioids

After my Pain is Manageable, I have Extra Opioid Pills – Now What?

1. Store them safely
   Extra pills can inadvertently find their way to family or friends, which can be dangerous. Keep all opioids in a secure place, and never share with others.

2. Dispose of them properly
   When you have finished taking opioids as directed by your doctor:
   • Bring them to a medicine disposal station in your city or town. Or bring them to MGH and put them in the marked container across from the Outpatient Pharmacy on the first floor of the Wang building.
   • Mix with used coffee grounds and place in the trash.
   • Flush them down the toilet.

MGH medication disposal bin, located on the first floor of MGH in the corridor to the right of the main information desk across from the Outpatient Pharmacy.
Need more information?

Contact your provider, or reach their office through the MGH operator

617-726-2000