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Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Aneurin Bevan
University Health Board

A Patient's Guide

Oramorph (liquid Morphine) for use in breathlessness

Why is it used?

Oramorph has been used as a treatment for breathlessness for many years and is proven to be effective and safe.

Is oxygen a treatment for breathlessness?

No, oxygen is used to correct low oxygen levels and reduce strain on your heart and lungs. You can have a normal oxygen level and be very breathless which is why we use other treatments for breathlessness like oramorph.

What is Oramorph?

Oramorph is a liquid form of morphine, which is often used as a pain killer, in small doses oramorph is used for the relief of long term or chronic breathlessness.

Will it help?

Patients have told us they find it very helpful in relieving their breathlessness. Many say it has allowed them to sleep better and to cope better with daily activities. Things we have been told by patients are:-

- I have had the best night's sleep in years
- It has helped with my daily routine,
- my day was a lot easier

How does it work?

Oramorph works quickly to relieve the feeling of being breathless and does not linger in your system. You will be started on a small dose of oramorph four times a day and if this seems to help you the dose can be gradually increased. You can also take extra doses when you are breathless, or before doing activities that you know will make you breathless.

What are the possible side effects?

As with all medicine there may be side effects which can include:-

- Constipation, which is why you have been prescribed a gentle laxative whilst you are taking oramorph.
- Skin itching (mild)
- Drowsiness (rarely), if you do feel drowsy it is important that you do not drive.
- Itchiness and drowsiness usually goes away over time and with continued use of oramorph.

Some people may feel concerned at the thought of using morphine for a number of reasons:

- Some people may recognize this as a medicine used for pain including when someone has cancer or is dying. This is absolutely not why oramorph is used for breathlessness.
- Some people may think that using morphine will make you addicted. The small amount of morphine used to treat breathlessness does not cause addiction. The oramorph can be safely weaned and stopped if it does not benefit you, or if you no longer need it.
- You might notice that the packet information leaflet includes a warning that states that it is dangerous to take oramorph when you have a breathing condition. This is only a potential problem if you need to take very large doses to treat pain. Oramorph is not dangerous in the low doses we prescribe for treating breathlessness.

What happens if the oramorph is not working for me?

It is important to let your doctor know if you feel that the oramorph is not helping, as it may be that you need a larger dose regularly, or other medicines may help. Everyone is different and it is often a case of finding out what suits you the best.

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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”.**