

# Liquid morphine for breathlessness

Respiratory Medicine

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: February 2024

Next review: February 2027

Leaflet number: 839 Version: 2

## What is liquid morphine?

Liquid morphine is often thought of as a painkiller, but is also given to people to reduce breathlessness. The type of liquid morphine we usually use is called **Oramorph**.

This has been used as a treatment for breathlessness for many years and is proven to be helpful and safe. It does not work for everyone, but it can help many people have a more comfortable breathing pattern, and give a feeling of relaxation.

Some people worry about using morphine for a number of reasons:

- You may think that morphine is used for pain, including when someone has cancer or is dying. This is absolutely not why Oramorph is used for breathlessness.
- You may worry you could become addicted to morphine. The small amount of morphine used to treat breathlessness does not cause addiction. The Oramorph dose can be slowly reduced and stopped if it does not benefit you, or if you no longer need it.
- You may notice that the package information leaflet includes a warning that says it is dangerous to take Oramorph when you have a breathing condition. This is likely to only be a problem if you need to take very large doses to treat pain. Oramorph is not dangerous in the low doses we give you for breathlessness.

## What dose will I need to take?

Oramorph is prescribed in different strengths. When treating breathlessness we usually use 10mg in 5mls oral solution. You will be started on a small dose of Oramorph usually 0.5ml to 1ml up to 4 times a day. If this seems to help, the dose can be slowly increased. Some people take the first dose at bedtime to see how it feels.

Oramorph works quickly (within 15 minutes) to relieve the feeling of being breathless and does not stay in your system. You can also take extra doses when you are breathless, or before doing activities that you know will make you breathless.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## How does it work?

There are lots reasons for breathlessness. Some of the muscles around the rib cage, and nose and mouth have receptors on them. These receptors notice when you breathe quicker or harder and send messages to your brain that tell your body that you are breathless. The Oramorph is thought to slow down these messages, and as a result you can 'feel' less breathless.

## What are the possible side effects?

The most common side effect is constipation. You should take Oramorph alongside a gentle laxative (medication to improve your ability to poo regularly). Other side effects can be feeling sick (nausea), itching and occasionally feeling sleepy (drowsiness). Usually any itchiness or drowsiness will go away over time and with continued use of Oramorph. Remember that not everyone will experience side effects.

## What happens if the Oramorph is not working for me?

If you think the Oramorph is not working let your nurse or doctor know. 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 best.

## Other considerations

If you feel drowsy do not drive or operate any machinery.

Please discuss drinking alcohol with your nurse or doctor.

Your Oramorph prescription may change as you continue to take it; please discuss any concerns you have with your nurse or doctor or with one of the hospital Interstitial Lung Disease (ILD) team.

## Contact details

Specialist ILD Pharmacist: 0116 258 3949

ILD Specialist Nurses: 0116 258 3949

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل  
જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।  
Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)