Medication name:
__________________________________________

Dosage: ______________________________________
Using Opioids for Chronic Pain

This pamphlet will tell you how to safely take opioids for chronic pain.

What are opioid medications and how can they help me?
Opioid medications are analgesics (painkillers), commonly known as narcotics. They are used to manage severe pain. They may be short-acting (immediate release) or long-acting (controlled release).

- Long-acting medications can give consistent pain relief over a long period of time.
- Short-acting medications can be used for breakthrough pain or a flare-up of pain.

Opioid medications can be safe and work well if prescribed and monitored by your doctor. You must be checked regularly to get the best benefit from this medication.
A doctor must follow strict guidelines when prescribing an opioid medication. A special monitoring program in Nova Scotia monitors all doctors who prescribe opioids, and all patients who use opioid medications. You must see your doctor each time you need a prescription. One doctor and one drugstore should be used to get your opioid medication.

**When do I take opioids?**
- Your medication may be taken with or without food.
- Take the medication as prescribed for best results.
- It is very important to follow your doctor’s directions.

**What if I miss a dose?**
If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose.

**Do not take a double dose.**
Some special precautions

• Tolerance and physical dependence tend to happen with repeated use of this type of medication. Read more in the ‘Common concerns’ section of this pamphlet.

• Talk to your doctor before taking this medication if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

• Talk to your doctor before taking this medication if you have:
  › Respiratory disease
  › Heart disease
  › Asthma
  › Seizures

• Seniors and people with kidney problems may need smaller doses.

• Your doctor will want to check on your progress. Make sure you go to all your appointments.

• **Do not stop taking this medication unless your doctor tells you to do so.**

• Take more or less of this medication exactly as your doctor tells you to. This will help you get the best pain relief and the fewest side effects.
• Do not stop taking this medication all of a sudden as you may have withdrawal symptoms. If your doctor asks you to take less or more, or stop taking opioids, your dose will be changed slowly over time.

• Tell your dentist and any new doctors or pharmacists, that you are taking opioids.

• Opioids may make you light-headed or drowsy. Make sure you know how your body reacts to this medication before you drive, use machines, or do other jobs where you need to be alert and able to see well.

• Check with your doctor before you take any other medications.

• Do not drink alcohol while taking opioids.

This pamphlet is just a guide. Please talk to your healthcare provider about your questions. We are here to help you.
Common side effects

› Trouble going to the bathroom
› Dizziness
› Drowsiness and/or tiredness
› Not able to sleep
› Nausea and/or vomiting
› Heart pounding
› Weakness
› Dry mouth
› Sweating
› Headaches
› Mood swings
› Restlessness

Many side effects will go away within 2 weeks of starting the medication. If they are severe or hard to manage, contact your doctor or the Pain Management Clinic.

Call your doctor right away if you have:

› Extreme drowsiness/slowed breathing (respiratory depression)
› Confusion and/or hallucinations
› Itching
› Rash
Common concerns
The use of an opioid medication can lead to tolerance, dependence, and/or addiction. Tolerance and dependence are often confused with addiction. These short explanations may help you understand the differences. Your doctor and clinic nurse will answer your questions.

**Tolerance** to an opioid medication can happen as your body gets used to the medication. You may have less side effects. You may develop a tolerance to the opioid medication. Over time the opioid medication may not work as well. Your doctor may have to change the amount of medication you take. Tolerance does not happen to everyone.

**Dependence** does not mean addiction. Physical dependence happens when opioid medications are used over a period of time. This means that your body has adjusted to having the opioid medication. Flu-like symptoms can happen if the medication is suddenly stopped. These symptoms can be severe. To avoid this, your doctor may lower the dose slowly over time, and treat any symptoms that happen.
Your doctor will decide if it’s necessary to stop the opioid or lower the amount that you are taking.

Many people are worried about trying opioid medication because they are afraid of addiction. Your doctor and clinic nurse will talk about this with you and answer any questions.

Some people are at a high risk for addiction, such as those who have misused other medications, alcohol, or street drugs. People who have had a problem with addiction in the past are at risk. People who have an uncontrollable urge to use a substance for the ‘high’ and not for the relief of pain, even though continued use will cause harm physically, financially, or to their social or emotional well-being, are at risk. Talk about this with your doctor to avoid any unnecessary problems.

What are your questions?
Please ask. We are here to help you.
How do I store my opioids?

• A locked box is strongly recommended.

• Keep opioids and all other medications out of the reach of children and pets.

• Do not store medications in a damp place such as the bathroom.

• Store tablets at room temperature (15-30°C).

• Store suppositories and liquid forms in the fridge in a locked box.
Questions for my healthcare provider:

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