

You or your family / carer may wish to discuss the issues raised in this leaflet.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions to your health care professional.

Oxygen and breathlessness.

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

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Oramorph (liquid morphine) for use in breathlessness

A patient's guide



What is Oramorph?

Breathlessness caused by a long term or chronic respiratory condition can be frightening and disabling. There are both medical and non medical treatments that may be recommended, one is oramorph.

Oramorph is a liquid form of morphine, which is used in very small doses for the relief of long term or chronic breathlessness.



Why is it used?

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

You may recognise 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.

You may think that using morphine will make you addicted. The small amount of morphine used to treat breathlessness does not cause addiction.

Also, the doses offered for breathlessness are very small which keeps side effects to a minimum. The benefits generally outweigh the side effects.

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

As we have been using oramorph to treat breathlessness at the Whittington Hospital for at least seven years we now have a lot of experience.

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 nights 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 breathlessness and does not linger in your system.

Before starting oramorph you will be carefully assessed. This is to ensure that this is the correct treatment and we have not missed something else causing increased breathlessness. For example, a chest infection, which would be treated with steroids and antibiotics. Patients who find oramorph useful can then continue on it long term.

What are the possible side effects?

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

- Constipation, which we will treat with a gentle laxative.
- Skin itching (mild)
- Drowsiness (rarely)
- Itchiness and drowsiness usually goes away over time and with continued use of oramorph.

You might notice that the packet information leaflet includes a warning that states that it is dangerous to take when you have a breathing condition. This is only if you are needing to take large doses to treat pain. Oramorph is not dangerous in the low doses we prescribe for treating breathlessness.