



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Your Prescription Pain Medication

This information explains how to safely get and take your prescription pain medication.

About MSK's Anesthesia Pain Service

Your Anesthesia Pain Service care team will work with you to control your pain from your cancer treatments with and without medication. This team includes doctors, advanced practice providers (APPs), registered nurses (RNs), and office and clinic coordinators. Examples of APPs include:

- Nurse practitioners (NPs).
- Physician assistants (PAs).
- Certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs).

The doctors and APPs work closely together. You may see a doctor, an APP, or both at the same time.

We can help control your pain by:

- Prescribing and adjusting pain medications.
- Doing a nerve block procedure. This stops your nerves from sending pain messages to your brain.
- Implanting a device into your body to help relieve your pain.

These treatments may also be combined with other non-opioid medications.

Prescription Pain Medication Information

We want you to use the least amount of medication needed to treat your pain. We also want you to take it for the shortest time possible. Follow these guidelines to safely take your pain medications.

How to Get Your Pain Medication

- **Get your pain medication from your pain doctor.** Other doctors may have prescribed you pain medication in the past. Only your pain doctor should write your prescriptions for pain medication. Do not ask other doctors to refill your pain medication.
- **Do not miss your pain doctor appointments.** If you're getting opioids from us, we will need to see you in our clinic once a month. MSK has many Anesthesia Pain Service clinics. They are listed in the "Anesthesia Pain Service Locations" section at the end of this resource.
- **Keep track of when you will need a new prescription for your pain medication.** Pain medications are only prescribed on business days (Monday through Friday). You will not be able to get a new prescription on a weekend or holiday.
- **Request a refill before your pain medication is finished.** We will need time to process your request.

How to Take Your Pain Medication

- **Take your pain medication only as prescribed by your pain doctor.** Do not take more than your pain doctor or nurse tells you to take. Taking more pain medication than you're supposed to may lead to harmful side effects. This includes trouble breathing or even death.
- **If you have trouble breathing or become unconscious, someone must call 911 right away.**
- **Do not drink alcohol while taking opioids, sleeping medication, or sedatives.** Sedatives are medications to help you relax, such as lorazepam (Ativan®). All these medications can make you drowsy (very

sleepy). Alcohol can make the drowsiness worse.

- **Do not suddenly stop taking your pain medication.** Stopping opioids suddenly can give you side effects from medication withdrawal. This includes nausea, vomiting (throwing up), sweating, and abdominal cramps. Side effects do not mean you're addicted. It's a normal reaction when you stop taking medication too quickly. If this happens and you have no pain medication, go to the nearest emergency room or the MSK Urgent Care Center (UCC).
 - The MSK UCC is on the 1st floor of Memorial Hospital. The closest entrance is 425 East 67th Street, between 1st and York Avenues.
- **Take at least a 1-day supply of your pain medication with you when you leave your home.** This is to make sure you have your pain medication with you in case of any emergency.
- **Some prescription pain medications such as opioids can cause constipation (having fewer bowel movements than usual).** Talk with your pain doctor if you had constipation in the past. You may need a medication to prevent constipation. For more information, read *Constipation* (<https://sandbox18.mskcc.org/pe/constipation>).
 - Call your pain doctor or nurse if you:
 - Do not have a bowel movement (poop) for 2 days.
 - Have trouble passing stool.
 - Have hard stool.
 - Cannot empty your bowels completely.

What to Do if You Miss A Dose

- If you miss a dose of your pain medication, do not take extra medication.
- If you miss a dose and you're having pain, call your pain doctor. They will help you.

How to Make Changes to Your Pain Medication

- **If you need any changes to your pain medication, call the Anesthesia Pain Service at 212-639-6851.** If another doctor adjusts your pain medication, call us by the next business day to discuss the change.
- **Do not change the dose of your pain medications without talking with your pain doctor or nurse.** Read the section “How to Get Your Prescriptions Between Appointments” for more information.
- **Do not drive or do things you must be alert for until you know how your new medication or dose affects you.** If your doctor changes your pain medication or dose, you may need time to get used to it. Some prescription pain medications can make you drowsy. You may also be at a greater risk of falling while getting used to your pain medication or dose.
- **If you wish to lower the dose of your pain medication, talk with your pain doctor.** They can help you safely lower the amount of medication you take. You may have withdrawal symptoms, but this is not common.

Talk with Your Other Healthcare Providers About Your Pain Medication

- Let any other healthcare providers you see know you’re taking pain medication.
- Tell your healthcare providers if you take other medications or dietary supplements, such as herbs, vitamins, or home remedies.
- If your other doctors prescribe sleeping medications or sedatives, tell them you’re also taking prescription pain medications. Your pain doctors rarely prescribe sleeping medications.

How to Store Your Prescription Pain Medication

- **Keep your pain medication away from others.** This includes children, pets, friends, family members, and visitors. Never share your medication with another person or take another person's medication.
- **Keep your pain medication in a safe place, such as a locked box or locked cabinet.** Keeping them locked up will make sure that only you or the person they were prescribed for can take them.

How to Report Lost or Stolen Prescriptions or Pain Medication

Keep track of your pain medications and prescriptions. Follow these steps if your medication is lost or stolen.

1. Contact your local police station and file a police report.
2. Fax the police report to the Anesthesia Pain Service at 212-717-3206 or bring it to us in person.
3. Call your pain doctor. You may need to see them before they can give you a new prescription.
4. Your prescription plan may not pay for your replacement medication. If it does not, you will need to pay for it.

How to Get Rid of Unused Prescription Pain Medication

If certain medications are used by someone other than who they were prescribed for, they can be very harmful or fatal (deadly). This is why it's important to get rid of any unused prescription pain medication.

The best way to get rid of these medications is to flush them down the toilet. To see if your medication should be flushed, visit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) flush list (www.bit.ly/3Am1Cei) or call 800-882-9539. For more information, read *How to Get Rid of Your Unused Medications* (https://sandbox18.mskcc.org/pe/getting_rid_medications).

You can also ask your healthcare provider for a DisposeRx kit. This kit has a powder that melts medication into a gel that you can throw away in your regular trash.

About Taking Opioids

Opioids are strong painkillers prescribed to help with moderate to severe pain. They're also called narcotics. Opioids are a controlled substance. This means they can be addictive. Using them too much or in the wrong way can lead to a strong, harmful need to keep using them. For that reason, you must treat controlled substances differently than other medications. For more information, read *Safe Opioid Use: What You Need to Know* (<https://sandbox18.mskcc.org/pe/opioids>).

If you're taking opioids, we want to make sure you're taking a safe amount. We will ask you for a urine (pee) sample at your first visit with your pain doctor. Your urine will be checked for medications and other drugs to make sure you're safe during your treatment. We also review a state-wide registry before writing prescriptions for controlled substances. This will be done routinely during your care.

About Naloxone (Narcan®)

If you're prescribed opioids, we will also prescribe you a medication called Naloxone (Narcan). This emergency medication can reverse an opioid overdose if you take more opioids than we prescribe you.

If you follow your healthcare provider's instructions for taking your medication, you will not need to take Naloxone. But we want to make sure you have it in case of an emergency.

Your healthcare provider will teach you and your caregiver how and when to use Naloxone. You will need a new prescription for Naloxone every year.

Naloxone should be used only in an emergency where your breathing slows down or stops. Always call 911 after using Naloxone. Its effects only last 30 to 90 minutes, and you may need more medical care. If you're unsure if you

should use Naloxone, call 911, and follow the operator's instructions. For more information, read *About Naloxone (Narcan®)* (<https://sandbox18.mskcc.org/pe/naloxone>).

How to Get Your Prescriptions Between Appointments

- Call your pain doctor or nurse at least 4 to 5 business days (Monday through Friday) before you're out of medication.
- Do not wait until you finished your medication to call. Refilling your prescription may take a few days. If you wait until you run out of medication, you may miss a dose.
- All prescriptions are sent to your pharmacy electronically (over the Internet). Your doctor cannot call these prescriptions into your pharmacy.

You can call the Anesthesia Pain Service at 212-639-6851, Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. If you call after 3 p.m., your doctor may not call you back until the next business day.

Your doctor cannot refill your prescription on Saturday, Sunday, or after 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. The office is closed, and the service is covered for emergencies only.

Steps to Refill Your Pain Medication Prescription

1. When you call your pain doctor or nurse to request your refill, they will ask you for the following information:
 - The name of your medication.
 - The dose of your medication.
 - The pharmacy you want the prescription sent to.
 - Your phone number so they can contact you if they have questions.
2. Your doctor will check a statewide registry before writing the

- prescription. If they have questions about how you're using the medication, they may talk with you before they refill your prescription.
3. Then, your doctor must sign off on the new prescription. This may not happen until the end of the day.
 4. Once your doctor signs off on the prescription, it's sent to your pharmacy electronically.
 5. Once your pharmacy gets the prescription, they must check with your insurance company to make sure it's covered. Sometimes, your insurance company will have questions before they let the pharmacy process the prescription.
 - Your medication may need prior authorization from your insurance company. It may take 1 to 3 days to get approval or denial. If it's denied, your doctor will need to prescribe a different pain medication.
 6. Your pharmacy will refill your prescription. If they do not have your medication in stock, they may need to order the medication.

How to Contact the Anesthesia Pain Service

By phone

If you have questions, need to talk to someone about your pain control, or want to make an appointment, call 212-639-6851. You can reach us Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. If it's after 4 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000 and ask for the anesthesia pain person on call.

We will ask you to leave your phone number so we can call you back. It's best to call earlier in the day. That gives us time to review your records or talk with your pain doctor, if needed. We will do our best to call you back the same day or the next business day.

If it's after 4 p.m. and you have an emergency, such as severe pain, call 212-639-2000. Ask for the anesthesia pain person on call. You can also go to your local emergency room or the MSK UCC.

Through MyMSK

You can also contact the Anesthesia Pain Service through our secure patient portal, MyMSK (my.mskcc.org). You can send us a message through MyMSK to ask for medication refills or questions about your care. We only review messages during business hours. They are not checked after 4 p.m., on the weekends, or holidays.

By fax

If you need to send a fax to the Anesthesia Pain Service, the fax number is 212-717-3206.

Anesthesia Pain Service Locations

The Anesthesia Pain Service has offices at many locations:

Memorial Hospital 1275 York Ave. (between East 67 th and East 68 th streets) New York, NY 10065	MSK Westchester 500 Westchester Ave. West Harrison, NY 10604
MSK Commack Nonna's Garden Foundation Center 650 Commack Road Commack, NY 11725	MSK Basking Ridge 136 Mountain View Blvd. Basking Ridge, NJ 07920
MSK Monmouth 480 Red Hill Road Middletown, NJ 07748	MSK Bergen 225 Summit Ave. Montvale, NJ 07645
MSK Koch 530 E. 74 th St. New York, NY 10021	MSK Nassau 1101 Hempstead Turnpike Uniondale, NY 11553

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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