

Fentanyl (Duragesic): *Safe use instructions*

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl (sometimes called by the brand name Duragesic) is a very strong opioid (narcotic) pain medication. It can help control chronic pain in people whose pain is not improving with other medications. Because it is so strong, it is only given to patients who:

- Suffer from long-term chronic pain, AND
- Have been taking high doses of another opioid pain medication for at least 7 days and are still in pain. (Fentanyl may also be given to patients who are unable to take pain medication by mouth.)

Caution: Use with extra care!

When used exactly as directed, fentanyl is safe and effective. But getting an **overdose** (too much medication at once) could cause you to breathe too slowly or to stop breathing. **This could threaten your life.**

You need to know how prevent a mistake that could cause an overdose in you or someone else.

How do I use fentanyl safely?

To use your fentanyl patches safely and avoid overdose:

- **Use fentanyl patches EXACTLY as your doctor prescribed.** Never use them for any reason other than prescribed.
- **When picking up your prescription,** tell your pharmacist about what kind of pain you have, and about any other pain medications you're taking.
- **When putting the patch on your skin:**
 - **Do not use more patches than prescribed.** Take off the old patch before applying a new one.
 - **Never cut the patches** or use a patch that is torn or damaged. This could cause an overdose.
 - **Do not use the patch over broken skin.** Do not put it over a sore, scratch, or cut. Do not shave the area before putting on the patch.



- **While wearing the patch:**

- **Do not let the patch get too warm.** If it gets too warm, your body will absorb too much medication. Do not let the patch be warmed by a heating pad, electric blanket, sauna, hot tub, heated waterbed, sunlight, or hot weather. When exercising, do not wear anything tight over the patch that could cause it to absorb extra heat from your body.
- **Do not wear a fentanyl patch during an MRI.** An MRI is a test that uses strong magnets to take images of the inside of your body. The patch has bits of metal that could burn you during this test.
- **Do not drink alcohol.**
- **Watch for signs of an overdose.** Contact your doctor or get emergency care right away if you experience:
 - Trouble breathing, shallow breathing, or very slow breathing
 - Extreme sleepiness
 - Trouble thinking, talking, or walking as normal
 - Feeling faint, dizzy, or confused

How do I put on the patch correctly?

- 1 Choose an area of skin where you will apply the patch. The area should be on your chest, back, flank, or upper arm and have no sores, cuts, or scratches. Do not choose an area that is getting radiation therapy.
- 2 Clean the skin with water, but no soap. Allow it to dry completely. If needed, trim the hair on the skin, but do not shave it.
- 3 Make sure the patch is not damaged or torn.
- 4 Apply the patch to the chosen area. Press it in place and hold for 30 seconds.
- 5 When it's time to replace the patch, remove the old one *before* applying a new one. (Your doctor will tell you how often to change the patch.)
- 6 Clean the area where you removed the old patch with water (no soap). Choose a new area of skin to apply the new patch.

Other cautions

- **Have a family member watch you closely for side effects** during the first 24 hours of wearing the patch, or after your doctor has increased your dose.
- **If gel leaks from the patch**, wash it off right away with lots of water. Do not use soap or alcohol.
- **If you forget to change your patch** at the scheduled time, change it as soon as you remember. Do not use extra patches.
- **Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice** while using fentanyl patches.
- **Talk with your doctor or pharmacist** about possible interactions with other medications you take.

How do I protect others?

The medication on a fentanyl patch is dangerous to others. If it accidentally gets on a pet, a child, or anyone else, they could be seriously hurt. Children can be especially at risk. For example, children have been hurt by medical patches when they put on a patch they found the trash, removed a patch from a sleeping person and put it on themselves, or mistakenly got a patch stuck to their leg after it had fallen off a family member.

To protect those around you:

- **Flush used and unneeded patches down the toilet.** Even after a patch is used, some medication will still be on the patch. To dispose of it safely, fold the sticky sides together and flush it down the toilet. (Many medications should be disposed of in other ways. There are only a few medications that should be flushed in order to prevent accidents. This is one of them.)
- **Store the patches where children can't get anywhere near them.** Don't let children see you put them on. Don't refer to them as stickers, tattoos, or Band-Aids. This may tempt a child to want to use one.
- **NEVER share your patches with another person**, even if that person has the same condition or symptoms you have.

When to call your doctor

Contact your doctor right away if you experience:

- Shallow or very slow breathing
- Strong dizziness
- Chest pain
- Slow or rapid heartbeat
- Bad headache
- Confusion
- Swelling in your arms or legs, or unusual weight gain
- Temperature of 102° F (38.9° C) or above
- Vision changes