

Medication Information Sheet



Fentanyl

brands: Duragesic®, Actiq®, Fentora®, others

Medications are only ONE part of a successful treatment plan. They are appropriate when they provide benefit, improve function and have either no or mild, manageable side effects. Importantly, medications (even if natural) are chemical substances not expected in the body, and as such have side effects. Some of the side effects might be unknown. The use of medications/drugs for any purpose requires patient consent. This practice does NOT require a patient to use any medication.

Information & potential benefits

Schedule II opioids are pain relievers that work on specific opioid pain receptors in the body. Opioids are believed to be the most effective pain killing medications. **Fentanyl is more potent than morphine, oxycodone or oxymorphone.** Alternatives include non-medication modalities, pain interventions and non-opioid medications. Schedule II opioids have the highest risk of abuse and addiction and the highest risk of fatal overdose. They cannot be refilled and cannot be called into a pharmacy.

Potential risks and side effects

Common and basic side effects include nausea, dizziness, lightheadedness, fatigue, sweating, mental clouding, constipation, itching, and sexual problems. You should let your practitioner know if you experience any of these. Constipation may need continued attention. Diet is important: eating fruits and vegetables & drinking plenty of fluids also can help. In many cases a laxative regimen is required. There is a risk of addiction with the use of controlled substances. The risk appears low unless there is a family or personal history of addiction to drugs or alcohol. However, there is no guarantee that you will not become addicted. Opioid pain medications increase the risk of asthma attacks or other lung problems in patients with lung disease such as asthma. All opioids are dangerous in persons with prostate problems, low blood pressure, head injury or increased intracranial pressure. Rare but serious side effects of opioid products include seizures, constipation requiring surgery, heart failure, and death. Drugs that DO inhibit the metabolism of fentanyl include: grapefruit juice, fluconazole, ketoconazole, itraconazole, erythromycin, telithromycin, clarithromycin, ritonavir, nefazodone and quercetin. These medications can result in potentially fatal overdose. There are drugs that make fentanyl medication weaker. If you use those medications while using fentanyl, and then stop those medications, the fentanyl may become suddenly stronger. Those medications include: phenobarbital, carbamazepine, St. John's Wort, modafinil, phenytoin, rifampin, dexamethasone, felbamate, griseofulvin, pioglitazone, primidone, topiramate, troglitazone, and rifabutin. PATCHES (Duragesic®): Please let the prescriber know if the patches cause any redness, do not stick properly, fall off early or otherwise cause problems. Patches cannot be used in hot circumstances, such as on a very hot day, in a hot tub, in a sauna, with a heating pad, etc. Doing so can cause a sudden release of fentanyl, causing fatal overdose.

Dosing information

LOZENGES (Actiq®) & TABLETS (Fentora®): The FDA has approved the fentanyl lozenges and dissolving tablets for the sudden, severe breakthrough pain associated with cancer. The FDA has acknowledged the recent studies that fentanyl dissolving tablets are safe and effective for breakthrough pain in patients with back pain and/or neuropathic pain, but they do not wish to approve this use, fearing an increase in drug abuse. The FDA has reiterated that physicians may legally prescribe the dissolving tablets for non-cancer pain, but that their withholding the formal approval means that the company cannot advertise the tablets for non-cancer pain. Because about 90% of these tablets are used for non-cancer pain, off-label use is the standard of care. There is a separate Fentora consent form to emphasize the issues briefly summarized above.

Important information

Disclaimer: This is for informational purposes only. This does not replace the instructions you received from your provider, does not constitute initiation of medical treatment or establishment of a patient-physician relationship, does not constitute any form of recommendation, prescription or medical advice, and does not imply that the medication is appropriate or FDA approved for any condition. This information is not a complete listing of instructions, doses, uses or side effects. If this was prescribed to you, you must review this information with your pharmacist and prescriber before starting the medication. Any medication may interfere with the ability to drive, concentrate or operate machinery; patients must be responsible for their own behavior and should not engage in any dangerous activity if there is any question of impairment. All medications have side effects and drug interactions, some serious, some fatal. Let all of your practitioners and pharmacists know about every substance used. Alcohol, herbals or illegal drugs are not considered safe with these medications. Assume no medication is safe during pregnancy or while breast feeding. The medication may interfere with birth control. Almost any medication can cause sleepiness, insomnia, dizziness, confusion, hallucinations, anxiety, panic, constipation or diarrhea, headache, chest pain and nausea or vomiting, among others. Most medications should NOT be stopped suddenly because of the risk of withdrawal.