

Codeine phosphate for restless legs syndrome

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide you with some information about codeine phosphate, which has been prescribed to treat your restless legs syndrome (RLS). If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is codeine phosphate?

Codeine phosphate belongs to a group of medicines called opioids. It is a type of weak opioid. Codeine can be useful when painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen have not been effective. It acts within the brain and spinal cord to decrease your feeling of, and reaction to, pain. Codeine can be used to reduce the pain and severity of symptoms associated with RLS.

Taking an unlicensed medicine

The use of codeine for treating RLS is unlicensed, which means that the manufacturer of the medicine has not specified it can be used in this way. However there is evidence that it works to treat this particular condition. The leaflet, **Unlicensed medicines – a guide for patients**, has more information about unlicensed medicines. If you would like a copy, please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Alternatively you can call the Pharmacy Medicines Helpline – contact details are at the end of this leaflet.

How do I take the medicine?

For the treatment of pain associated with RLS, codeine is taken orally (by mouth) once a day at night. Although it can be taken on an empty stomach, taking codeine with food can help prevent feelings of sickness which can occur with the first few doses. It should be swallowed whole with a glass of water.

Keep taking the tablets until your doctor tells you otherwise. Stopping suddenly can cause problems and your doctor will want you to reduce your dose gradually if you need to stop treatment.

What should I do if I forget to take the medicine?

If you forget to take the dose before you fall asleep, do not worry. Take the next dose when it is due. **Do not take an extra dose the following evening to make up for a missed dose.**

Are there any side effects?

The following are examples of some of the side effects reported by patients taking codeine.

For further information on side effects, please see the manufacturer's leaflet that comes with the medicine.

Side effect	What should I do if it happens?
Common (between one in 100 and one in 10)	
Feeling or being sick	Stick to simple meals – avoid rich or spicy foods. Try taking your doses of codeine after food, as this may help protect your stomach.
Constipation	Eat a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of water each day. If this continues, speak with your doctor.
Feeling dizzy or sleepy	If this happens, do not drive or use tools or machines. Do not drink alcohol.
Shallow breathing and other breathing problems	Let your doctor know about this.
Dry mouth, sweating, tummy pain	Speak with your doctor if troublesome.

If any of the side effects persist or become a problem, please contact your GP/consultant or pharmacist for advice.

Is there anything else I need to know?

It is possible for you to become dependent on codeine. Stopping suddenly can cause problems such as feeling restless and irritable. If you have been taking it for some time and want to stop it, your doctor will recommend that you reduce your dose slowly in order to avoid the risk of these effects.

If you are a driver, please be aware that codeine may affect your reactions and ability to drive. It is an offence to drive while your reactions are impaired. Even if your driving ability is not impaired, if you drive, you are advised to carry some evidence with you which shows that the medicine has been prescribed for you – a repeat prescription form or the patient information leaflet from the packet is generally considered suitable.

Do not take more than you are prescribed as codeine can reduce your breathing rate if taken in large doses.

If you are due to have an operation or dental treatment, it is important that you tell your consultant, GP or dentist who can advise you further.

Do not drink alcohol while you are taking codeine. Mixing alcohol with codeine may be dangerous as it can reduce your breathing rate, and it increases the risk of other side effects.

Codeine should be kept out of reach of children. If anyone other than you takes this medicine, you, they or their parent/carer should contact NHS 111 for advice. If they are unwell then they should call for an ambulance.

The expiry date is printed on the container. Do not use the medicine after this date. The remainder should be returned to your local pharmacy to be discarded.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding:

We do not recommend the use of this medicine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. You should let your consultant know if you are planning a pregnancy so that a management plan can be agreed. If you discover that you are pregnant, please contact your consultant for advice as soon as possible.

Sleep hygiene: Taking codeine is not a replacement for a good sleep routine. It is still important to aim to get around seven to eight hours of sleep at night if possible. It is advisable to go to bed when tired, and get up at about the same time each day.

Can I take codeine with other medicines?

Codeine rarely causes problems with other medicines when used for RLS. Check with your GP or pharmacist if you have any worries. If you are buying any medicines over the counter from a pharmacy always mention that you have been prescribed codeine. It is safe to take ibuprofen or paracetamol with this medicine. Seek advice from a pharmacist when buying herbal or homeopathic remedies.

How will my treatment be reviewed?

Your treatment will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and the dose adjusted in response to your symptoms.

How do I get a repeat prescription?

Your GP will give you a repeat prescription for codeine, which you can take to your local community pharmacy for supply.

Useful sources of information

RLS-UK Supporting people with restless legs syndrome, **w:** www.rls-uk.org/

You might find this charity's website useful for connecting with patients who suffer from the same condition as you, but any new information found should not alter your current treatment programme and you should discuss any new advice with the doctor caring for your condition.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your sleep disorder please contact the Sleep Disorder Centre, **t:** 020 7188 3430, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Out of hours:

Please leave a message and a member of staff will call you back in working hours; alternatively please contact your GP or NHS 111.

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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